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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the classification decisions that affect a student's opportunity to learn to read, this document outlines a study analyzing the classification practices in two urban elementary schools in Illinois. Chapter one defines the issue of student classification and its impact on how students are taught to read, examines implications for providing quality educational services, and reviews research methodology. Chapter two presents the service quality model, with its five features, used to focus the research, while chapter three describes the two school districts and their major classification systems, including assignments to mainstream reading programs and special programs. The next three chapters define the three interlinked activities that shape reading-related student classification: (1) establishing the structure for providing services, (2) assessing and placing children, and (3) coordinating and providing instruction. Chapter seven discusses the critical preferred practices that facilitate appropriate classification, including establishing budget priorities, and chapter eight summarizes some key implications to be drawn from this study (such as the need to define standards), comments on selected public policy issues (such as the systemic roots of service quality problems), and proposes a strategy for reform focused on reading. A 25-page report summary is attached. (LLZ)

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Student Classification and the Right to Read

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Mary O'Connell edited the report, and Jean Newcomer and John Markson typed the final manuscript.

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CHAPTER 1. RATIONALE AND METHODS

Three Intertwined Issues: Student Classification, Reading, and the Right to Quality Education

This research report deals with three intertwined issues of major importance in formulating educational policy: the way students are classified by the public schools, the impact of these classification practices on the way students are taught to read, and the implications of the classification-reading relationship for efforts to provide a quality education for all students.

The Crucial Importance of Classification in Shaping Children's School Experience

Researchers studying American public schools have noted that public school students are constantly being classified in a variety of formal or informal ways.1/ Consider, for instance, an eight-year-old Hispanic girl who enters the Elgin, Illinois, public schools this September. She would quickly be assigned to a school, a grade, and a teacher, becoming "a third grader at Homewood School in Miss Evans' room." Miss Evans would then assess her reading ability and "place her in a reading book," that is, assign her to one of a series of fifteen levels in the Holt Reading Series; she might thus become "a Level 12 reader" or simply "a Level 12."

If she has difficulty speaking English, she might be evaluated for inclusion in the bilingual program, and classified as a "Level III Hispanic" in terms of her mastery of English. (This could result in her being transferred, along with her siblings, to another school, since Elgin's bilingual programs are housed in mostly white middle-class schools to promote racial balance.) If her English was judged adequate, but she began experiencing difficulties in learning to read, she might become "a Title I," receiving supplementary help in reading through the federal Title I program, or "an LD resource," receiving special help to deal with what has been diagnosed as a learning disability.

In addition to making these overt classification decisions, educators also attach dozens of less formal labels to students.2/ A child might be pegged as "good at math," "slow but no trouble," "a smart mouth," or "from a broken home" -- all with important consequences for the child's school experience.

The set of overt and covert labels thus attached to a child profoundly shapes educational services, in ways that are both intended and unintended, both helpful and harmful. As Nicholas Hobbs, perhaps the best-known student of classification, has noted:

> The magnitude and complexity of the problem faced by policy-makers and practitioners can hardly be overstated, for the effects of classification can be both beneficial and harmful. For example, children who are categorized and labeled as different may be permanently stigmatized, rejected

> by adults and other children, and excluded from opportunities essential for their full and healthy development. Yet, categorization is necessary to open doors to opportunity, to get legislation, funds, service programs, sound evaluation, research, and even effective communication about the problems of exceptional children.3/

Hobbs is speaking here of special education programs for handicapped children, but his remarks about classification apply to all children, since classification shapes children's school experience in the "mainstream" educational program as well as in various special programs.

Thus, one focus of this research project has been to understand the major overt classification systems that are used to group elementary school students in two Illinois school districts.

Student Classification and the Right to Read

Classification practices have a pronounced impact on the educational objective that most educators and citizens regard as the top priority for the public schools: learning to read. A major rationale for almost every formal labeling decision -- grade-level placement, assignment to a level in the mainstream reading program, placement in a bilingual class, a Title I class, or a special education class -- is that this decision will enhance a child's opportunity to learn to read.

In studying student classification, we looked especially at its role in shaping the programs and services through which children are taught to read. We analyzed, for example, the impact that such classification decisions as placing a child in a remedial reading pullout program had on the coordination of the child's reading experience between her mainstream classroom teacher and her remedial reading teacher.

Classification, Reading, and the Right to a Quality Education

Classification practices, including those that shape a child's reading instruction experience, are important in influencing all children's right to a quality education. As we will illustrate later, schools with dysfunctional approaches to student classification are likely to provide inappropriate services to the high achieving children who are bored and become discipline problems and children viewed as average who are never pushed to achieve their highest potential, as well as the children who have difficulties achieving basic levels of mastery.

However, student classification is particularly important to those groups of children who have characteristically been shortchanged by the educational system, including racial and ethnic minorities, low-imcome students, handicapped students, and females. (We refer to these children collectively as "children at risk" in the rest of this report.) Children at risk are both the special victims of damaging labels and the potential beneficiaries of labeling practices that single them out for more appropriate educational services.4/ In the case of reading, for instance, special education programs often represent an attempt to overcome handicapping conditions that keep children from learning to read; bilingual programs are an attempt to maintain children's reading progress in their own language, while teaching them to read English; Title I programs represent the effort to overcome reading difficulties of low-income children.

Policy making and policy implementation that address the American commitment to provide "equal educational opportunity" or "educational equity" for children at risk are inextricably bound up with issues of student classification and its effect on reading instruction. We have carried out this research about student classification and reading by applying a specific model for thinking about educational improvement that takes educational equity issues into account. This service quality model (explained in Chapter 2) helps us identify ways in which the quality of student classification decisions and student opportunities to learn to read can be made substantially better for all students, including children at risk.

The Research Strategy

Gaps in Past Research

The acknowledged impact of classification practices on critical educational issues has produced a great deal of research.5/ Taken as a whole, however, this research has several limitations which prevent it from being maximally useful to those who want to improve the schools.

First, most research focuses on a single classification system (e.g., the system for dividing children into reading groups in the regular classroom or for placing children in bilingual education programs). Research is also needed about the general characteristics of student classification systems and the ways different classification systems interrelate in shaping a student's school experience, including a student's experience in learning to read.

Second, most research about classification focuses on one level of the educational system (e.g., it focuses on the way that school level evaluation teams decide on special education placements). However, classification decisions at the school and classroom level are affected decisively by actions at the federal, state, and school district levels. For example, state and federal regulations and funding formulas for compensatory education create strong incentives to classify children in particular ways in local schools. Research is needed that explores how actions at multiple levels of the educational system affect student classification.

Third, research about classification has resulted in a myriad of specific pieces of information concerning the nature of various classification practices, but this research often fails to suggest specific avenues for improving children's school experience. Research about classification will be more useful to school reformers if it is conducted within a theoretical framework that suggests specific recommendations for school improvement.

The research reported here begins to fill these gaps in our understanding of classification practices. We have analyzed classification practices at the elementary school level in two moderately sized urban school systems in Northeastern Illinois: Oak Park and Elgin. We have developed a holistic picture of classification in these school districts that includes an analysis of several major student classification systems, some key interrelationships between these systems, and ways that actions at the federal, state, school district, school, and classroom levels affect student classification. We have focused especially on classification decisions that affect a student's opportunity to learn to read.

The study is a small-scale effort, and thus raises as many questions as it answers. Nevertheless, it provides a number of fresh insights for those concerned about student classification and its role in providing opportunities for children to learn to read.

Key Classification Systems Studied

The two school districts whose classification practices we studied were selected from among the 29 school districts in Northeastern Illinois with more than 1,000 black and/or Hispanic students, excluding the city of Chicago. We wanted to study school districts that had a substantial minority and low-income student population, because of our interest in the effects of classification on children at risk; however, we also wanted to study school districts that were small enough so that we could acquire a holistic sense of the way various classification systems related to each other and the ways central office and local schools related to each other in planning and implementing classification systems. The two school districts selected were chosen because they met the above criteria and because we were able to obtain cooperation in providing access to staff and to school district documents. (Detailed information about each district is presented in Chapter 3.)

As noted earlier, student classifications vary on a continuum from overt to covert. Some classifications, such as assignment to a grade, reading level, or special education class, are overt, in the sense that formal rosters are kept of students so classified. Other classifications are entirely covert -- e.g., labels like "troublemaker" employed by an individual teacher. Still other classifications fall somewhere in between; teachers may generally agree, for example, that certain students are "slow," but this student classification may never become part of the official classification system employed by the school.

The focus of our research has been to identify the customary practices of educators in these districts related to overt classification -- particularly the practices important in shaping the way in which reading programs and services were provided. These classification decisions shape students' experience in learning to read both in the "mainstream" or regular instructional program and in a number of "special programs," including special education for handicapped students, bilingual education, English-as-a-Second-Language, Title I, and remedial reading. (We use the terms "mainstream program" and "special programs" throughout the report.)

The key classification decisions we analyzed were as follows:

- Assignment to a school.
- Assignment to a grade level.
- Assignment to a mainstream (regular) classroom teacher or teaching team.
- Assignment to a reading level and reading group in the mainstream reading curriculum.
- Assignment to bilingual or English-as-a-Second-Language programs.
- Assignment to federal Title I programs.

- Assignment to one of a number of special education placements for handicapped children.
- Assignment to remedial reading.

Key Research Questions

The plan for data collection and analysis we used in studying these systems was shaped by the service quality model, a model of the way the educational system functions that focuses attention on the nature of specific services provided to children. With an eye to the issues highlighted by the service quality model, our research focused on the following questions:

- What are the formal rules for placing students in each of these classifications?
- What are the customary practices for placing students in each of these classifications?
- How many students are placed in each classification, broken down by race and ethnic group? What factors explain any racial or ethnic disproportions in the number of students in various classifications?
- What practices at the classroom, school, school district, state, and federal levels have operated to create and maintain present classification systems and practices?
- How does one classification system affect another (e.g., does attendance at a particular school affect the likelihood that a student will receive remedial reading services)?
- How does classification practice affect the delivery of reading programs and services? What gaps in service exist?
- In what ways are services and programs coordinated (or not coordinated) between those

staff members responsible for instructing children in various classifications?

The service quality model, which guided us in framing and investigating these questions, focuses the research on information useful for those trying to improve educational programs and services for children, including children at risk. This model not only guided our research, but it was also refined as a result of the data gathered in this project. Thus, a refined version of the service quality model, as it applies to the student classification issue, is one product of our research effort and is described in some detail in Chapter 2.

Research Methods

Data Collection. To explore the questions listed above in light of the service quality model, the research team employed focused qualitative research methods.6/

First, major research questions listed above were broken down into subquestions.

Second, key individuals knowledgeable about the overall operations of the two school districts were interviewed, so that we could determine what documents and what individuals could provide us with evidence bearing on our questions.

Third, we collected all relevant documents that we could find -- federal laws and regulations, school district procedure manuals, memoranda, school district resolutions, statistical reports, etc. (We continued to collect such

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material for the duration of the study.)

Fourth, we conducted structured interviews with pertinent central office staff in each school district. Altogether we interviewed fifteen central office staff members in Elgin and four in Oak Park (which has a much smaller central office staff). Staff members interviewed included, for example, the assistant superintendent for elementary education, the reading coordinator, learning disabilities supervisor, bilingual coordinator, and so forth. These individuals were often interviewed several times.

Fifth, we interviewed key staff members in selected local schools. It was necessary to make different logistical arrangements to conduct school-level interviews in the two districts. In Elgin, we conducted interviews in seven elementary schools selected in cooperation with central office staff to reflect a variety in terms of size, racial/ethnic makeup, socioeconomic makeup, number of special programs, location, and general reputation (a "good," "average," or "bad" school). In each of these seven schools, we interviewed the principal, three regular classroom teachers teaching at different grade levels, the learning disabilities teacher, and, when present, the bilingual and Title I teachers.

In Oak Park, we collaborated in the data collection and analysis process with the Oak Park Parent Teacher

Organization Council, a district-wide coalition of school-based parent groups. Two members of our research team were also active members of the PTO Council, which wanted to conduct an analysis of reading, mathematics, and special education programs in the district. We collaborated with the PTO Council in developing interview formats, and the parents and two of our staff members conducted school-level interviews in all eight elementary schools. The principal of each school was interviewed, as were teachers in several of the schools.

As will become clear when we discuss the service quality model in the next section, a major focus of all document analysis and interview questions was to identify the structure of classification systems and the customary educational practices that created and maintained these systems. How many students were served by Title I programs and how were they selected? What was the process for referring and evaluating a child for bilingual education? How was it decided how many learning disabilities teachers were assigned to particular schools? Those interviewed were pressed to give real examples of how the system worked. They were shown regulations and asked to explain how actual practice deviated from written policy. They were shown racial counts of the number of students in specific classifications and asked to explain how any racial disproportions developed. They were presented with our initial interpretation of how particular classification systems worked and asked to comment on their accuracy.

Data Analysis and Interpretation. Field notes from all interviews were transcribed on field data forms. Then, the research team reviewed documents and field data forms to generate propositions responding to the set of research questions we initially defined. For example, the research team generated propositions like the following:

- Principals in the majority of schools visited are not active in coordinating the reading instruction programs in their schools.
- Within the district not much thought has been given to the problems of transition when a student moves from one program to another (e.g., bilingual to regular class, regular class to LD resource).

Such propositions were entered on a standard form on which research team members also indicated data supporting the proposition, data conflicting with the proposition, and alternative propositions for explaining a pattern we had documented. The propositions were initially generated by those members of the research team most familiar with a particular school district, and they were then reviewed and refined by all team members. Then, the propositions were used as the basis for writing detailed narrative responses to each research question, resulting in a basic analytical statement of some 200 pages. Often we did not have sufficient data to answer all aspects of a question definitively, but rather our data clarified key issues that should be investigated in subsequent research.

Next, we used the analytical statement to prepare Chapters 3 to 6 of this analysis, which describe what we view as the most important patterns and issues revealed through the research project.

Having clarified some important elements of present practice, we then explored some specific steps that might be taken to improve present practice with the aim of increasing educational quality in student classification and in reading instruction. Drawing on previous research on classification and on reading instruction, generally accepted standards for appropriate practice, and our own research information, we developed some examples of "critical preferred practices" for student classification and related efforts to teach children to read, and indicated how such practices could in fact be implemented in school districts like the ones we studied. This analysis of preferred practices is presented in Chapter 7.

Finally, in Chapter 8, we relate some of our major conclusions about current classification practice and the improvement of reading instruction to key issues in the larger debate about appropriate educational policy. We also recommend a way to build on our findings to carry out a practical strategy for school reform focused on improving children's opportunities to learn to read.

Notes

1/See, for example, Herbert Goldstein et al., "Schools," in Issues in the Classification of Children: A Sourcebook on Categories, Labels, and Their Consequences, vol. 2, ed. Nicholas Hobbs (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1976), pp. 4-61; Hugh Mehan et al., "Teachers' Interpretations of Students' Behavior," to appear in Communicating in the Classroom, ed. Louise Cherry Wilkinson (New York: Academic Press, 1981), (typewritten); Raymond C. Rist, The Urban School: A Factory for Failure (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973); Judith Warren Little, "Some Social Consequences of Sorting Practices in Schools: A Review of the Literature," Center for Action Research, Inc., Boulder, Colo., February 1980. (Typewritten draft.)

2/See, for example, Mehan; F. Erickson and J. J. Schultz, Talking to the Man: Social and Cultural Organization of Communication in Counselling Interviews (New York: Academic Press, 1980).

3/Nicholas Hobbs, The Futures of Children: Categories, Labels, and Their Consequences, A Summary (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975), pp. 6-7.

4/For documentation and examples of this point see Paul R. Dokecki et al., "Low-Income and Minority Groups," in Hobbs, Issues, vol. 1 (1975), pp. 318-348; Massachusetts Advocacy Center, Double Jeopardy: The Plight of Minority Students in Special Education (Boston: Author, 1978); Children's Defense Fund of the Washington Research Project, Inc., Children Out of School in America (Cambridge: Author, 1974); J. R. Mercer, "A Policy Statement on Assessment Procedures and the Rights of Children," Harvard Educational Review 44 (February 1974): 125-141; Diana v. State Board of Education, No. C-70-37 RFP (N.D. Cal. June 18, 1973); Larry P. v. Riles, No. C-71-2270 RFP (N.D. Cal. Oct. 16, 1979), MDLR 397.

5/The most complete recent summary of this research is presented in Hobbs, Issues, vols. 1 and 2.

6/Briefly, in our use of focused qualitative research methods, we use the methods of qualitative research (e.g., semi-structured interviewing and qualitative document analysis) to conduct a focused analysis of a specific issue. The tradition of qualitative research from which we draw emphasizes rigor in the development of research propositions from data and the use of quantitative information to cross-check qualitative judgments whenever possible. Discussions of this tradition in qualitative research appear, for instance, in B. Glaser and A. Strauss, *Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine, 1977); Pertti J. Pelto, *Anthropological Research: The Structure of Inquiry* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); L. Smith and W. Geoffrey, *The Complexities of an Urban Classroom: An Analysis toward a General Theory of Teaching* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968); Howard Becker, "Problems of Inference and Proof in Participant Observation," in *Issues in Participant Observation: A Text and a Reader*, eds. George J. McCall and J. L. Simmons (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969).

CHAPTER 2. SERVICE QUALITY:
A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR INVESTIGATING STUDENT CLASSIFICATION AND ITS IMPACT ON READING

As explained in Chapter 1, this research project has been guided by a model for understanding educational systems that we call the service quality model. This model, which forms the basis for Designs for Change research about educational issues, influenced the major questions we investigated in the research project (as listed in Chapter 1) and our subsequent interpretation of the data we collected. Moreover, our data collection and analysis in this study posed questions about the service quality model itself that allowed us to spell it out more fully.

This chapter describes the service quality model in some detail, since the model both forms the foundation for the research findings presented in Chapters 3 through 7, and, in its refined form, is itself a product of the research project.

We employ this model for two reasons. First, it facilitates the accurate analysis of the way the educational system currently provides services and programs for children, including the ways that it deals with children at risk. Second, the model helps us recommend how specific reforms can be carried out that will improve service quality. Below, we describe the major features of the service quality model and indicate how the use of the model facilitates this reform-oriented analysis.

Five Major Features of the Service Quality Model

The past fifteen years has been a period of major reform in public education. Changes in public policy at the federal, state, and local levels have been directed toward improving the quality of education for children, children who have been seriously shortchanged by the American educational system (children at risk).

These efforts to improve the quality of education through public policy initiatives have left us with an enormous body of information about how the schools function, how they change, and how they resist change.

Some read this evidence pessimistically, concluding that relatively little can be done to improve educational quality through changes in public policy. In contrast, our interpretation of this evidence, including our own research, suggests a useful new approach for thinking about what educational quality means and how it can be achieved.

The resulting service quality model, which is described in the rest of this chapter, has five major features. These features and the major points we make about them are summarized briefly in Table 2-1. We urge the reader to review Table 2-1 as a guide to this presentation. Below, we discuss each of these five features in turn, highlighting some of the model's key implications for analyzing student classification as it relates to reading.

Feature 1. A Focus on the Nature of Services Provided to Children

If schools are going to provide a better education for children, changes must be made in the programs and services provided to children day-to-day. "Bad schools" must become "good schools" in some sense. The service quality model is based on an emerging perspective, derived from recent research about the nature of schools, that calls conventional views about the characteristics of a good school into question.

In the early 1960s, there was a general consensus about the characteristics of good schools. Good schools had modern buildings, well-equipped laboratories, large libraries, teachers with advanced degrees, small classes, and the latest curriculum materials. Bad schools lacked these resources.

Research carried out in the 1960s, most notably Equality of Educational Opportunity, shook these conventional ideas by indicating that differences in such tangible school characteristics as age of building, average level of teacher training, and number of books in the library were not correlated with student achievement, once

Table 2-1. An Overview of the Five Major Features of the Service Quality Model

FEATURE 1. A FOCUS ON ANALYZING THE NATURE OF SERVICES ACTUALLY PROVIDED TO CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS DAY-TO-DAY.

a. Recent research concerning the characteristics of school environments suggests an "emerging viewpoint" about how schools function, a viewpoint that emphasizes the central importance of analyzing services provided to children.

b. The emerging viewpoint calls attention to the following:

    (1) Social process in the school decisively shapes the use of resources. Two schools with similar resources often provide starkly different services.

    (2) The programs and services provided to children in the classroom are strongly influenced by the social system of the school as a whole.

    (3) Instruction is but one of several important school-level services that determine a child's opportunity to learn; classification and discipline, for instance, are other school-level services that decisively affect children's learning opportunities.

    (4) Service provision often follows informal unwritten rules that differ substantially from formally stated procedures.

    (5) Careful coordination of services to children is the exception rather than the rule in most schools.

FEATURE 2. A FOCUS ON DEFINING STANDARDS FOR JUDGING SERVICE QUALITY.

a. Defining standards for service quality is critical in thinking about school reform. There are three complementary standards for judging service quality.

    (1) Service quality as equal opportunity for basic access to school and for access to specific types of school services.

    (2) Service quality as the opportunity to receive services shown through research to foster progress toward high priority educational objectives.

    (3) Service quality as the opportunity to receive extra or different services responsive to special needs and abilities.

(Table 2-1 continued)

FEATURE 3. A FOCUS ON UNDERSTANDING THE WAYS IN WHICH A NETWORK OF "KEY ACTIVITIES," THAT STRETCHES FROM THE CLASSROOM TO SCHOOL TO SCHOOL DISTRICT TO STATE TO FEDERAL LEVELS, AFFECTS THE QUALITY OF SERVICES TO CHILDREN.

a. Key activities carried out at multiple levels of the educational system affect the quality of services to children.

b. By analyzing what people at various levels of the system do day-to-day that creates the configuration of services provided to children, we build a knowledge base for reforms to improve service quality.

FEATURE 4. A FOCUS ON IDENTIFYING "CRITICAL PREFERRED PRACTICES," I.E., SPECIFIC WAYS OF CARRYING OUT KEY ACTIVITIES AT VARIOUS LEVELS OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM THAT RESULT IN HIGHER QUALITY SERVICES FOR CHILDREN.

a. Prevailing practices for carrying out key activities often create and sustain low service quality.

b. Although it is impossible to make sweeping changes in prevailing practice, service quality can be enhanced by identifying critical preferred practices and working for their implementation.

FEATURE 5. A FOCUS ON EMPLOYING ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES DRAWN FROM SOCIAL SCIENCE THEORY HELP US UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF SERVICES TO CHILDREN, THE NETWORK OF KEY ACTIVITIES THAT SHAPES THESE SERVICES, AND THE SPECIFIC PRACTICES THROUGH WHICH THESE ACTIVITIES ARE CARRIED OUT.

a. While no comprehensive theory of organizational behavior exists, perspectives drawn from different social science theories can be applied successively to illuminate particular aspects of the educational system's operation.

b. Six alternative perspectives have proven useful in this analysis of the educational system:

(1) systems management perspective

(2) organizational patterns perspective

(3) conflict and bargaining perspective

(4) subculture perspective

(5) economic incentives perspective

(6) teacher participation and development perspective

student social background was taken into account.1/

Some investigators concluded from these results that differences in the characteristics of school environments were of limited consequence in determining student growth and progress. In contrast, other researchers delved more deeply into the nature of school environments, developing more sophisticated analyses of school characteristics than Coleman's paper-and-pencil surveys.

For example, numerous investigators have recently attempted to identify schools that are effective in teaching low-income children to read and to determine how the process of education in these schools differs from the process of education in schools that do a poor job of teaching these children to read.2/ It has been found, for instance, that such instructionally effective schools have energetic principals who provide continuity for the school's instructional program, while ineffective schools have principals who busy themselves with routine administrative matters and allow every teacher to teach reading in his/her own way.

Another group of investigators, for instance, have been analyzing the amount of time that students spend engaged in learning.3/ Learning time differs markedly from school to school, and such factors as adequacy of teacher planning and the nature of school-wide scheduling have an important effect on the amount of time that students spend actively engaged in learning.

Still another group of investigators, primarily associated with child advocacy groups, have called attention to the mechanisms by which substantial numbers of poor, minority, handicapped, and female children are entirely excluded from school or shunted into inferior educational placements, such as classes for the mentally retarded. They have found wide variations between schools in the extent of such detrimental practices, even in comparing schools that serve similar student bodies.4/ This line of investigation illustrates still another approach to identifying those characteristics of school environments that have an impact on children's growth and progress.

In addition to carrying out empirical studies, researchers studying school environments have applied a range of social science theories to the analysis of how schools function. These have been drawn from sociology, political science, the study of organizations, anthropology, and economics. For example, organization theory calls attention to the ways in which the staff members of an organization (like a school) exercise substantial discretion in carrying out their jobs -- discretion which works against the effort to exert control from the top.5/ Conflict and bargaining theories drawn from political science highlight the struggle for power and resources that goes on underneath the surface in schools as in all organizations.6/

Taken together recent empirical research and theoretical analysis begin to paint a new picture of the educational services provided day-to-day to children that differs from the conventional viewpoint about what school characteristics determine educational quality. Below, we describe briefly some ways in which this emerging viewpoint about the nature of school services (on which the service quality model is based) differs from the conventional view. Later in this section, we describe some of the major theoretical perspectives drawn from political science, sociology, and other disciplines that aid in clarifying this emerging viewpoint.

The Emerging Viewpoint: Social Process Decisively Shapes the Use of Resources. The conventional viewpoint about the characteristics of a good school emphasized the importance of its tangible resources: buildings, number of staff, dollars invested, etc. In contrast, the emerging viewpoint emphasizes the importance of social process within the school: the way teachers treat students, the extent to which teachers collaborate, the extent to which the school principal provides instructional leadership. This emerging viewpoint recognizes that tangible resources are important, but insists that their impact is affected decisively by the way they are incorporated into the school's social structure and process.7/

For example, in the course of our research we visited two schools to which Hispanic students with limited English-speaking ability had been bused. In each school, these Hispanic students attended a bilingual class for half the day and a mainstream class for the other half. In one school, the principal and staff viewed the bilingual program with extreme hostility. They described the bilingual program as "housed in" their school but not really a part of it; the staff distinguished in conversation between the Hispanic children and "our children." There was no cooperative planning between bilingual and mainstream classroom teachers, so that the Hispanic children involved participated in two entirely unrelated experiences as they moved between bilingual and mainstream classes. When children left the bilingual program for good, principals had an option of retaining them at the receiving school or returning them to their neighborhood school; the principal of the first school consistently chose to send the Hispanic children back to their neighborhood school.

In the second school, the principal took the lead in creating a much different situation. The bilingual program was viewed as an integral part of the school and bilingual and regular teachers were expected to plan collaboratively. Bilingual students were retained at the school after they left the bilingual program, and careful planning facilitated the transition into full-time work in the mainstream classroom.

Each school had a bilingual program with the same level of staffing. However, the use that was made of these staff resources and the resulting services to children were fundamentally different in the two schools. For two groups of children classified as needing bilingual education, the resulting services, including those services vital for teaching children to read, contrasted sharply.

The Emerging Viewpoint: The Classroom as Part of the School's Social System. The conventional view of a good school focuses almost exclusively on the individual classroom; according to this view, what matters for children occurs almost entirely at the classroom level. The emerging viewpoint also underscores the importance of the classroom, but emphasizes that the classroom is part of a larger social system (most immediately, a part of the school) and that its entanglement in the school as a social organization often decisively shapes what goes on in the classroom.8/ For example, the differences between the two bilingual programs described above can be traced largely to differing attitudes of the two school principals. One principal was hostile to the bilingual program and encouraged mainstream classroom teachers to view it as an intruder. The other principal welcomed the program and its students and attempted to integrate them into the life of the school. The classroom experience of these Hispanic children was profoundly affected by these contrasting attitudes. And it is highly unlikely that an individual teacher in the hostile school would buck the prevailing staff norms and work collaboratively with a bilingual teacher with whom she shared students.

In the same fashion, classification practices which affect students are shaped by school-wide as well as classroom influences. For instance, schools serving students from similar student backgrounds differ widely in the extent to which they classify students as educable mentally handicapped, behavior disordered, serious discipline problems, etc.9/ Many of these differences can be traced to differing school-wide norms. In schools where large numbers of children are referred for special education placement, for instance, one cause of this problem is often a school-wide staff norm that it is acceptable to "refer out" children who fall outside of fairly narrow ranges of classroom behavior, rather than to deal with these children in the mainstream classroom.

The Emerging Viewpoint: Other Services to Children Are Important Besides Instruction. The conventional view stressed the preeminent importance of instruction as the key service provided to students. The emerging viewpoint indicates that instruction is but one of a number of services that shape a student's chance to benefit from schooling; it calls attention to the impact of such activities as disciplining students, counseling students, and classifying students.10/ Is discriminatory discipline pushing minority students out of school? Are girls being counseled away from traditional male occupations and related coursework? Do transportation schedules keep black students who are bused to a formerly all-white school from participating in extracurricular activities? The emerging viewpoint sensitizes us to such questions.

Student classification is one of the school-level activities whose importance has become increasingly salient. For example, as we will discuss in Chapter 6, students in the mainstream reading program who receive part-time pullout instruction in reading from a bilingual, special education, Title I, or remedial reading teacher often are being taught reading in two completely different ways and without joint planning between their mainstream reading teacher and special program teacher. Or neither may be teaching these students to read because each perceives that the child is "getting his reading" elsewhere. Thus, a classification decision designed to help the student in fact creates severe discontinuities in his instructional experience because of the way it is implemented. Hence classification practices decisively affect instructional practices in reading and are not merely background noise to the process of instruction.

The Emerging Viewpoint: Both Formal and Informal Methods of Operations Are Important. The conventional view of the good school emphasized the school's formal methods of operation: written curricula, stated procedures for evaluating students for special education, and the like. The emerging viewpoint emphasizes, in addition, the importance of informal aspects of educational practice that may be at variance with formally stated procedures.11/ With respect to classification, for instance, federal and state requirements for evaluating children for special education placement require that a child's needs first be evaluated and that the school district then develop a program to meet those needs. However, along with other researchers, we have noted that educators frequently tailor their assessment of a child's needs to those special education programs in which the school or district currently has "slots" available.12/

The Emerging Viewpoint: Service Coordination Can't Be Assumed. The conventional view assumed that the school's services were being carefully coordinated to foster a student's development. However, we have repeatedly documented, as have others, that the norm in most schools is little or no service coordination. Teachers function as individuals, and efforts to coordinate their activities are characteristically seen as violations of their professional prerogatives.13/ Our research in Elgin and Oak Park showed that coordination between mainstream classroom teachers on the one hand and special education teachers, bilingual education teachers, or remedial reading teachers on the other, was the exception rather than the rule.

In summary, then, the emerging viewpoint about the school environments on which the service quality model is based calls attention to the need for careful analysis of services to children, because variations in the specifics of services provided day-to-day are the direct determinants of a child's opportunity to learn in school. Further, in analyzing services to children, the service quality model is based on evidence that social process decisively shapes the use of resources; that the school's social system has a major impact on what happens in the classroom; that the nature of school services like classification and discipline are vital determinants of opportunity to learn, in addition to the nature of instruction; that both formal and informal methods of operation shape a child's school experience; and that discontinuities in service coordination are characteristic of most schools.

This emerging viewpoint suggests why considerable difficulties have been encountered in implementing educational reforms and in bringing about improvements in children's reading achievement. Clearly, achieving quality education is a much more difficult task than was widely assumed 20 years ago.

However, this emerging viewpoint also suggests a useful and effective way to think about improving educational quality, one that focuses on the nature of educational services actually provided to children.

Feature 2. A Focus on Defining Standards for Judging Service Quality

The emerging viewpoint about the characteristics of schools described above draws our attention to the specifics of the services provided to children. This evidence suggests that it will be highly productive to identify standards for service quality and to make these standards the focus of educational reform efforts. Based on an extensive review of research evidence from the past twenty years,14/ we have identified three complementary standards for judging service quality that show great promise as focal points for improving the quality of education for children, including children at risk. These three service quality standard focus on (1) access to school services, (2) the opportunity to receive services shown through research to foster student progress, and (3) the opportunity to receive extra or different services responsive to special needs and abilities.

We have discussed each of these service quality standards in detail elsewhere.15/ Below we discuss each of the three briefly, explaining their particular relevance to this research project.

Standard 1. Access to School Services. Particularly for children at risk, access to school services remains a serious problem, as we have documented extensively elsewhere.16/ There are two types of access difficulties that have been and remain substantial. First, some students are excluded entirely from school; they receive no school services at all. Because the present research is focused on elementary schools (rather than secondary schools where basic access issues affect a higher percentage of students), this aspect of access to services did not figure prominently in the present study.

Second, some students attend school, but lack equal opportunity for access to services that are available to other students.

> Example. Burke studied the assessment data for black students in an Illinois school district where blacks were overrepresented in self-contained classes for the Educable Mentally Handicapped and underrepresented in Learning Disability resource programs. She concluded that many of the black children in EMH classes had score profiles that strongly suggested the presence of a learning disability, calling the appropriateness of the EMH placement into question.17/
>
> Example. Historically, there have been no Spanish-speaking special teachers in Elgin. Thus, Spanish-dominant children who need special education have simply not been assessed and placed.

These types of service access issues frequently affect an identifiable group of children at risk. However, differential access can affect all kinds of children; for example, as we will document later, fragmented planning decisions in the school districts we studied often meant that students attending different schools in the same district had widely differing opportunities for admission to various special programs and services.

Thus, this standard for service quality implies that the schools have an obligation to minimize barriers to both basic access and access to specific services for identifiable groups of students (black students, students in a particular elementary school, etc.).

Standard 2. The Opportunity to Receive Services Shown through Research to Foster Student Progress. In 1972, the Rand Corporation made a statement that was subsequently quoted widely: "Research has not identified a variant of the existing system that is consistently related to students' educational outcomes."18/ In light of educational research in the intervening years, this statement is now false. There is increasing research evidence that certain characteristics of services to children (including services to children at risk) lead to valued student growth and progress, particularly progress in learning to read. We cited earlier, for example, the repeatedly documented relationship between achievement levels of low-income children and the presence of a school principal who acts as an educational leader to give coherence to the school's instructional reading program. Thus, from a service quality perspective, children are experiencing inequitable service if they must attend a school that lacks such an educational leader. The second service quality standard suggests that children should have the opportunity to attend schools with characteristics consistently shown to foster student growth. This standard for service quality is particularly important when applied to the *highest priority* objectives of the public education system, including the opportunity to learn to read.

Standard 3. The Opportunity to Receive Extra or Different Services Responsive to Special Needs and Abilities. A frequently stated aim of the educational system is to provide, within the constraints of available resources, extra or different services responsive to special needs and abilities. Children at risk, for whom the standard educational program is likely to fail, have frequently been the target groups for such services.

It would be ideal if services responsive to special needs and abilities could always be based on convincing research; however, decisions about the nature of such special services -- like almost all decisions in education -- must usually be based on informed judgment rather than firm research knowledge that a particular approach will definitely foster student progress.19/ In the absence of firm research knowledge or when the implications of research evidence are in dispute, educators must be expected to make reasonable plans for responding to special needs, to carry these plans out in practice, to assess their results, and then to modify their approach and try again. Educators at least have the obligation to try in an organized planful way to respond to special needs and abilities.

Of course, the effort to respond to special needs must be carried out with limited resources, raising issues about priorities. We believe that school districts should make a priority commitment to provide services designed to help all children reach the district's highest priority educational objectives, and this includes the opportunity to learn to read. For children at risk, this often means responding in some planful way, for instance, to linguistic difference or handicap. Yet research evidence indicates that this service quality standard is frequently not met.

> Example. In 1976, national data reported to the Office for Civil Rights indicated that while 1,038,000 students enrolled in the public schools spoke a language other than English predominantly or exclusively, only 459,000 (44%) of these students were being provided with any form of bilingual or English-as-a-Second-Language program. If anything this data underestimates the number of unserved students.20/

There is a long tradition of providing extra or different services responsive to such special needs.

However, when one closely analyzes the nature of such efforts to provide special services, one finds numerous inadequacies. Resources intended to benefit children with special needs and abilities are in fact diverted for other purposes.21/ Children are misclassified, so that some who will not benefit from a particular service receive it, while children who would benefit do not.22/ In many instances where special services are being provided, they are often not coordinated with other services that the child is receiving, or the quality of the special service itself is extremely low.23/ As such evidence suggests, problems in providing extra or different services are only in part questions of conflicting demands for scarce monetary resources. Often, as we will illustrate subsequently through our research results, failures to provide special services reflect extremely inefficient use of existing resources.

An analysis of various failures to provide services responsive to special needs and abilities suggests a series of specific requirements for service quality. Briefly summarized, the educational system should make a commitment to provide services designed to help all children reach high priority educational objectives. Further, promised services should in fact be provided to their intended beneficiaries, with steps taken to minimize the dangers of singling out a particular group of children for special treatment.

Obviously classification practices are pivotal in determining whether this service quality standard is being met.

Implications for Analyzing Student Classification and Reading Instruction. The three complementary standards for judging service quality discussed above have clear implications for thinking about student classification and reading instruction. First, groups of students (minorities, females, students attending a particular school) should have equal access to services that provide reading instruction, and student classification practices should facilitate and not hinder this access. Second, school districts have an obligation to provide services that have been shown through research to foster student progress in reading and to employ classification practices that allow the widest range of students to receive these effective services. Third, even in the absence of clear research evidence that a particualr program will foster student reading progress, districts have an obligation to try in a systematic way to meet special student needs that limit reading progress and to classify students in ways that will maximize the potential benefits and minimize the potential harm of singling some children out for extra or different services.

In Chapters 4 through 6, we discuss how well prevailing educational practice in classifying students and teaching them to read conforms to these service quality standards, and we note some areas of discrepancy. In Chapter 7, we suggest the types of educational practices that would help the schools achieve these standards.

Feature 3. Understanding the Network of Key Activities Carried Out by the Educational System That Shapes Services to Children

Local schools and classrooms, the point at which services are provided to children, are elements in a complex educational and political system, that includes the school district central office, the school board, local government, state education agencies, the state legislature, colleges of education, educational publishers, teachers' organizations, parent organizations, the federal Department of Education, the Congress, state and federal courts, and so on. And of course each of these governmental and educational agencies and private organizations is composed of numerous offices, departments, committees, that have a hand in shaping what happens to children at the school and classroom level. With enough time and a large enough piece of paper, one could make an organizational chart of these various institutions, of their components, and of some of the ways they are tied to each other. In our analysis, we refer to the system we would diagram on this piece of paper as "the educational system."

From the perspective of the service quality model, we view the educational system as a system for providing services to children. To understand how inadequate services are created and maintained and to understand how better services can in fact be provided, it is useful to develop a special overlay for our chart of the educational system. This overlay identifies those key activities carried out within the system that are most important in shaping the quality of services to children. Some of those key activities, such as "disciplining students" or "providing instruction in the mainstream reading program" are the means through which the educational system directly provides its services to children. Other activities -- such as "appointing district-level and school-level administrators" (as carried out by the school superintendent), "developing regulations to interpret laws" (as carried out by the state legislature), or "enforcing federal court decisions" (as carried out by the Department of Education or the federal court system), are more remote, but nevertheless crucial in shaping services to children. We noted earlier the interdependence of educational activities at the classroom and the school level. Research during the past decade also calls attention to the interdependence among activities at all levels of the system.24/ For instance, if state special education laws provide more funding for separate special education placements than for mainstream placements, local districts will be deterred from creating mainstream placements.25/

Activities are *important recurring patterns of behavior within the educational system*. Our concept of "activities" is based on similar concepts employed in organizational research and referred to as "standard operating procedures" or "routines."26/ Developing an exhaustive listing of them in a system so complex is a mammoth task. Further, alternative lists of activities can clearly be developed that break down the important actions of an individual or agency in different ways or in more or less detail.

Nevertheless, we have found it feasible to identify a limited number of key activities that shape *particular aspects* of services to children, such as reading-related student classification. By looking first at the nature of services to children, one can then begin to identify the activities that created this particular state of affairs. For instance, we observed, as have others, that educators will not normally recommend student placements in special programs in which there are no slots available and thus create an overload on that particular program. This observation suggests the importance of activities entailed in the school district budget development process that determine the number of slots available in particular programs and thus shape the nature of student classification practices.

In specifying such key activities, we select a level of detail most helpful in clarifying how improvements in service quality can be brought about. We choose recurring actions that that can potentially be brought under conscious control in a reform effort. And we define activities in the terms that are used by those who actually carry them out to enhance further the likelihood that this analysis can be used as the basis for reform.27/

The activities we identify are common to the organizational life of most or all similar units within the educational system. For example, teachers in all school districts continue, year after year, to "refer students for special program assessment"; school districts continue year after year to "appoint district-level and school-level administrators."

Such activities can be broken down further into "sub-activities" that are also carried out year after year. For example, federal agencies enforcing regulations distribute these regulations, develop agency plans for efforts to enforce them, and so on.

Taken together, we refer to this set of interdependent activities and sub-activities at various levels of the educational system as the network of activities. By analyzing the nature of this network of activities, we highlight the actions that various educators, administrators, and politicians take day-to-day that affect the quality of services for children. By focusing on what they do, we are better able to reach conclusions that have practical implications for school improvement.

Central in the research effort reported here has been the identification of a set of key activities that shape student classification systems and reading instruction. In Table 3-7, we provide a list of these key activities and in Tables 4-1, 5-1, and 6-1, we spell out this list in more detail, indicating some of the key sub-activities that fall under each of these activities. Such listings of key activities constitute an extremely useful "map," helping those who wish to improve the quality of services understand which educational activities are most crucial in shaping services to children.

Feature 4. Critical Preferred Practices for Carrying Out Educational Activities

Having identified key activities and sub-activities within the activities network -- the activities that are most crucial in shaping services provided to children -- one can then examine these activities and sub-activities in still more detail, identifying the specific practices through which an activity or sub-activity is carried out in a particular setting. As we use the term, "practices" are the distinctive ways that an activity or sub-activity is carried out in a particular setting.

An example will illustrate how key activities and their associated practices determine the quality of services to children in specific situations (and once again the importance of student classification in shaping service quality). There are 14,000 black students classified as Educable Mentally Handicapped who attend the public schools in Illinois. Even using the most expansive definitions of mental retardation, at least 7,000 of these students are not retarded by any reasonable definition of the term and do not belong in these classes.28/ This widespread misclassification has been created and is being maintained by a set of key activities and associated critical practices carried out in several parts of the educational system, ranging from the school to school district to state to federal levels. In Table 2-2 we give examples of these key activities and some practices associated with each activity.

By identifying such key activities and the practices associated with them, one begins to understand how misclassification arises at the school level. High rates of misclassification arise in part because some teachers refer black children who are discipline problems for EMH evaluation,29/ and this practice is tolerated or even encouraged by their school principals. Once a child is referred, inappropriate standards for admission to EMH (high cutoffs on IQ tests, failure to employ tests of the child's adaptive behavior) again heighten the possibility of misclassification.30/ At the state level, financial reimbursement formulas provide an incentive to maintain EMH

Table 2-2. Examples of Key Activities and Associated Practices That Affect the Rate of Classification of Black Students in Illinois as Educable Mentally Handicapped

LEVEL OF THE SYSTEM	KEY ACTIVITY EXAMPLES	ASSOCIATED PRACTICE EXAMPLES
Federal level	Establishing federal requirements concerning the process of classification.	Practices in developing regulations to protect minority students against discrimination in assessment procedures, as embodied in PL 94-142.
	Enforcing federal court decisions.	Practices in monitoring the implementation of a federal consent decree in which the Chicago Board of Education has agreed to stop using IQ tests as a tool for assessing students for EMH placement.
State level	Establishing state laws, regulations, and grant requirements.	Practices establishing the system of state reimbursement for EMH teachers.
	Enforcing state requirements.	Practices for reviewing the student assessment process in local school districts to insure that it is non-discriminatory.
School district level	Establishing policies for referring, assessing, and placing students in special instructional programs.	Practices in selecting tests and cutoff scores for EMH assessment.
	Coordinating among central office staff responsible for mainstream reading and for special instructional programs.	Practices that determine how children should be taught to read who have special needs cutting across several special programs.
School and classroom levels	Coordinating among school level staff who carry out mainstream reading and special instructional programs.	Practices through which the school principal either encourages or discourages teachers from referring disruptive students for EMH placement.
	Assessing and placing students for special programs.	Practices that encourage or discourage teachers from assigning students with problems to available slots in special programs whether or not the placement is appropriate.

classes, and superficial state enforcement of non-discrimination requirements means that discriminatory local practices go unchallenged.31/ At the federal level, in turn, weak federal enforcement aimed at state departments of education allows weak state enforcement practices to persist.32/

In Chapters 4 through 6, we apply this analytical strategy to classification-related practices of the educational system that affect reading instruction. We identify prevailing educational practices related to classification and analyze the ways that many of them create inferior services for children.

However, analysis of educational practice in light of the service quality model goes beyond demonstrating how inferior services develop. The overriding purpose for applying this model is to identify critical preferred practices that will result in improved service quality for children. For example, the two school districts that we studied had different rates of assignment of black students to classes for the Educable Mentally Handicapped. Most experts in the field of mental retardation believe that no more than 2% of any group of students should be assigned to these classes, and the estimates of some experts are much lower than 2%.33/ In grades K-6, Oak Park assigned 1.1% of its black students to EMH classes, while Elgin's rate of black student placement in EMH was 5.2%. One critical difference between the practices of the two districts lies in the standards they have employed in evaluating a student for EMH (see Table 3-6). Oak Park required an IQ cutoff score of 69 or less. Elgin, in contrast, used a cutoff score of 80 on the IQ test. While this is not the only major difference in the two districts' EMH classification practices, it appears to make a major contribution to the higher rates of assignment to EMH in Elgin. In contrast, the EMH classification standard employed by Oak Park is an example of what we term critical preferred practices, educational practices that, if implemented, can make a major contribution to achieving service quality for children.

Other examples of critical preferred practices are emerging from the work of many researchers looking at varied aspects of educational practice. The analysis of schools that are effective in teaching the widest range of children to read is identifying a set of critical preferred practices for organizing such instructionally effective schools. For instance, these effective schools take regular steps to assess student progress in reading and they modify instructional programs in light of this assessment. Individual schools may carry out this assessment and replanning process in different ways, but in some fashion they almost all do it.34/

These brief illustrations suggest the key qualities of critical preferred practices, as we employ the term. First, they are "preferred" in the sense that they have a demonstrated relationship to the improvement of services for children. Second, they are "critical" in the sense that they are, among the thousands of practices carried out by various actors in the educational system, the ones that are most helpful in correcting an important shortcoming in present services. Thus, the concept of critical preferred practices does not reflect a simplistic systems management approach to reform, which has as its ideal the comprehensive control of all behavior involved in carrying out educational policy.35/ Rather, the concept of critical preferred practices reflects the desirability of altering a limited set of practices that are most crucial in determining service quality.

In Chapter 7, we identify some critical preferred practices that can enhance the quality of student classification as it relates to reading.

Feature 5. Alternative Perspectives for Understanding the Educational Process

The final feature of the service quality model is the use of alternative conceptual lenses for understanding the nature of services to children, the network of activities that shapes these services, and practices entailed in carrying out these activities. Ideally, the service quality model should draw on a comprehensive theory about behavior in complex organizations that would explain the dynamics of the educational system. However, at this point in the evolution of social science, no such single comprehensive theory is available. Allison was the first to illustrate a way to cope with this problem. He pointed out that existing partial theories about human behavior can be applied successively as alternative conceptual lenses, each one illuminating some important facets of organizational behavior (while obscuring other facets).36/ Others have applied this approach specifically to the analysis of the educational system.37/ This is the strategy we have used in developing the service quality model. We employ six conceptual lenses (or perspectives, as we also refer to them) to help us understand the reasons that certain key activities are carried out as they are and how, realistically, current practice can be altered to improve service quality. These six perspectives are the systems management perspective, the organizational patterns perspective, the conflict and bargaining perspective, the subculture perspective, the economic incentives perspective, and the teacher participation and development perspective. Elsewhere, we have explained in some detail how these six perspectives offer alternative interpretations that help us understand the functioning of the activities network and its associated practices, as well as suggesting why reform is resisted and how it can be successfully implemented.38/ Below, we explain each perspective briefly.

1. *Systems management perspective*. From this perspective, the educational system is viewed as a hierarchical system in which persons with formal authority at various levels define basic policies, develop plans for carrying them out, and then insure compliance with these plans through the systematic use of various rewards and sanctions. The systems management perspective emphasizes the importance of *leadership* in maintaining present practices or introducing new ones. It places great importance on the role of rational *systematic planning* in the operation of the system and on the use of *formal rewards and sanctions* in shaping the system's activities and related practices.39/

2. *Organizational patterns perspective*. From this perspective, the educational system is comprised of hundreds of semi-autonomous work units that exercise substantial *discretion* in the way they carry out their jobs day-to-day. Within these units, members develop *informal work routines* that may be at variance with formal procedures. And they inevitably *fragment* ambitious plans for serving students into bits and pieces that may distort and frustrate overall objectives.40/

3. *Conflict and bargaining perspective*. From this perspective, the educational system is shaped by a constant process of conflict and bargaining, as individuals and formal and informal groups strive to *maintain and increase*

their power and resources. Thus, one can expect individuals and groups to facilitate, hinder, or modify plans for providing services to children according to their partisan interests.41/

4. Subculture perspective. From this perspective, people in various parts of the educational system develop substantially different ways of looking at the world, different frames of reference about what schools are like. These frames of reference can motivate anything from enthusiastic cooperation with reform to stalwart resistance. Frames of reference allow those charged with implementation to develop powerful rationalizations for continuing present practice, rationalizations that are shared by members of their subculture.42/

5. Economic incentives perspective. From this perspective, an important key to behavior in organizations is the way money is spent and the incentives or disincentives that finances create to carry out programs in particular ways. The theory also recognizes, however, that non-economic incentives play a role in shaping behavior.43/

6. Teacher participation and development perspective. From this perspective, reforms break down at the school and classroom level because those that have the ultimate responsibility for implementing them are not permitted to participate in their formulation and do not receive supportive assistance in acquiring the new skills needed to

do things differently. If these needs are not met, and reforms are "crammed down people's throats," those responsible for classroom implementation will find ways to circumvent them.44/

In analyzing the activities network as a whole and in examining individual activities, it is extremely useful to ask how each of these six perspectives illuminates observed behavior. For example, applying each of the six perspectives has given us insights into the misclassification of black children in EMH classes that are summarized in Table 2-3.

As the examples in Table 2-3 suggest, applying the six theoretical perspectives to the analysis of the activities network helps explain why practices for carrying out various key activities take the form they currently do, what dynamics of the present system are threatened when one tries to institute critical preferred practices, and how such preferred practices can be implemented. We have used these six perspectives in planning this research project, and in Chapters 3 through 6, the reader will notice repeated references to these perspectives in our analysis of research results.

A Final Word: The Service Quality Model and the Study of Student Classification Related to Reading

The service quality model provides an extremely productive framework for research on student classification related to reading. First, the model calls attention to the crucial importance of a careful analysis of the complicated blend of services actually experienced by children in learning to read, services in which student classification plays a central part. The model indicates a number of important characteristics of these services that expand traditional conceptions of "good schooling," especially the decisive ways in which details of social process within the school and classroom affect the nature of services to children.

Second, the model suggests three helpful standards for determining whether services designed to teach children to read and to classify them for reading programs and services are being provided in a way that maximizes educational quality for all children.

Third, the model points out the extent to which the quality of student classification and reading instruction practices is shaped by a network of activities carried out at the federal, state, and school district levels, as well as at the school and classroom levels.

Fourth, the model calls attention to the specific educational practices through which activities are typically carried out at each level of the educational system. And it helps identify critical preferred practices for student classification and reading instruction that will increase service quality.

Table 2-3. Some Observations of the EMH Classification Process Consistent with the Six Perspectives

SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

- In schools and school districts where we observe the highest rates of EMH misclassification, school principals and central office leadership condone and sometimes encourage misclassification.
- In Champaign, Illinois, where substantial changes have been made in practices leading to misclassification, the leadership of a committed school superintendent over a period of several years was pivotal.

ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERNS PERSPECTIVE

- School psychologists develop deeply ingrained procedures for EMH assessment, and they continue to adhere to these procedures even when the formal rules for EMH classification are altered.
- In many schools, each teacher's classroom is viewed as his/her own turf, and it is considered inappropriate for other teachers to enter the classroom to give advice or help. Thus, plans for providing in-class assistance to mainstream teachers, so that student problems can be dealt with in the classroom rather than through EMH referrals, tend to run aground on this obstacle.

CONFLICT AND BARGAINING PERSPECTIVE

- EMH teachers will organize politically to fight the reassignment of present EMH students to the mainstream educational program, in order to protect their jobs.
- The reclassification of EMH students is much more likely to be pursued when a well-organized interest group (e.g., black parents mobilized by a local NAACP chapter) exerts persistent pressure for reform of present practices.

SUBCULTURE PERSPECTIVE

- Teachers who refer students with high IQs for EMH sometimes observe that the child "must have learned the test since he's taken it so many times" and is "really EMH."
- Some mainstream teachers who make inappropriate EMH referrals believe that their job is to teach "the kids who come ready to learn" and that dealing with "problem children" is someone else's job.

(Table 2-3 continued)

ECONOMIC INCENTIVES PERSPECTIVE

- School districts that want to declassify EMH students in Illinois face a stiff financial disincentive. Under current state funding formulas, they will not be able to use special education funds to aid the students' transition to the mainstream classroom, since declassified children will no longer be considered handicapped.
- The school district budgeting process is the most critical single step in creating the continuum of services available to handicapped children. By and large, staff will not place or even refer children for special education programs in excess of the budgeted number of program slots.

TEACHER PARTICIPATION AND DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

- Mainstream classroom teachers often lack the skills to deal with a wide range of individual differences in the classroom, so that one way to address the misclassification problem is to increase relevant teacher skills.
- Mainstreaming misclassified students is more likely to be effective if the first mainstream teachers who work with these students have volunteered to do so.

Fifth, the model underscores the usefulness of applying alternative theoretical perspectives (alternative conceptual lenses) to analyzing behavior within the educational system. The usefulness of each of six perspectives in explaining classification practices has been illustrated above and will be further illustrated in the interpretation of research results in the remainder of the report.

Notes

1/James S. Coleman et al., Equality of Educational Opportunity (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1965).

2/Recent efforts to identify the characteristics of schools that teach reading effectively to low-income students include: Phi Delta Kappa, Why Do Some Urban Schools Succeed? The Phi Delta Kappa Study of Exceptional Urban Elementary Schools (Bloomington, Ind.: Author, 1980); Richard Venezky and Linda Winfield, "Schools That Succeed Beyond Expectations in Teaching Reading," University of Delaware Studies on Education, 1979, (typewritten); Wilbur B. Brookover et al., School Social Systems and Student Achievement (New York: Praeger, 1979); Michael Rutter et al., Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children (Cambridge: Harvard Univ., 1979); and Ron Edmonds and John Frederiksen, "Search for Effective Schools: The Identification and Analysis of City Schools That Are Instructionally Effective for Poor Children," Center for Urban Studies, Harvard University, 1978, (typewritten).

3/See, for example, David E. Wiley, "Another Hour, Another Day: Quality of Schooling, a Potent Path for Policy," in Schooling and Achievement in American Society, eds. W. H. Sewell et al. (New York: Seminar, 1975); Nancy Karweit, "Time in School," Center for Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University, August 1979, (typewritten); Newsletter: The Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study, October 1978 (Sacramento, Ca.: Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing).

4/See, for example, The Task Force on Children Out of School, The Way We Go to School: The Exclusion of Children in Boston (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970); Children's Defense Fund of the Washington Research Project, Inc., Children Out of School in America (Cambridge: Author, 1974); Citizens' Council for Ohio Schools, Children Out of School in Ohio (Cleveland: Author, 1977).

5/Graham T. Allison, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), pp. 78-95; Richard F. Elmore, "Organizational Models of Social Program Implementation," Public Policy 66, no. 2 (spring 1978): 199-205.

6/Frederick M. Wirt and Michael W. Kirst, The Political Web of American Schools (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972).

7/For example, Rutter et al. studied schools in London's inner city serving similar student bodies. They found that those differences in school resources that were observed among these schools were not correlated with student achievement, but that differences in the nature of services provided to children were in fact strongly correlated with student achievement.

8/See, for example, Brookover et al.

9/An example drawn from school discipline illustrates this point. In the Chicago Public Schools, there were 24 high schools with a student population more than 90% black in 1979-80. Six of these schools suspended less than 2% of their students in that year. Seven of them suspended more than 14% of their students in the same year. Frequently, schools with high and low rates of suspension were serving the same section of the city and in close proximity to each other. "Chicago Public Schools Suspension Data, 1979-1980." (Typewritten.)

10/We have already noted research studies that call attention to the importance of discipline, counseling, and classification, including Children's Defense Fund, Children Out of School; F. Erickson and J. J. Schultz, Talking to the Man: Social and Cultural Organization of Communication in Counselling Interviews (New York: Academic Press, 1980); Nicholas Hobbs, ed., Issues in the Classification of Children: A Sourcebook on Categories, Labels, and Their Consequences, 2 vols. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1976).

11/Francis A.J. Ianni, "Social Organization Study Program: An Interim Report," Council on Anthropology and Education Quarterly 5 (May 1974): 7; Elmore, pp. 201-203.

12/Hugh Mehan et al., "Identifying Handicapped Students," to appear in Politics and Administration: Organizational Analysis of Schools and School Districts, ed. Samuel B. Bacharach (New York: Praeger Press), (typewritten), pp. 53-67; Marian S. Stearns, David Greene, and Jane L. David, Local Implementation of PL 94-142: First Year Report of a Longitudinal Study (Menlo Park, Ca.: SRI International, 1980), pp. 53-67.

13/This point has been underscored for organizations in general and for schools in particular by such writers as Karl E. Weick, "Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems," Administrative Science Quarterly 21 (March 1976): 1-18; Seymour B. Sarason et al., "Teaching Is a Lonely Profession," in Psychology in Community Settings, ed. Seymour B. Sarason (New York: John Wiley, 1966), pp. 74-97; Dan C. Lortie, Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1975).

14/Donald Moore, Sharon Weitzman, Lois Steinberg, and Ularsee Manar, *Child Advocacy and the Schools* (Chicago: Designs for Change, forthcoming).

15/Ibid.

16/Ibid.

17/Arlene Avery Burke, "A Study Comparing the Placement of Black Children in Educable Mentally Handicapped Classes versus Learning Disability Classes" (master's degree thesis, Northeastern Illinois University, 1972).

18/Harvey A. Averch et al., *How Effective is Schooling? A Critical Review and Synthesis of Research Findings* (Santa Monica, Ca.: Rand, 1972), p. 154.

19/For a statement of this position see Israel Scheffler, *Reason and Teaching*, International Library of the Philosophy of Education, gen. ed. R. S. Peters (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973).

20/U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office for Civil Rights, *Directory of Elementary and Secondary School Districts, and Schools in Selected Districts: School Year 1976-1977*, vol. 1, p. xiv.

21/Children's Defense Fund, *Children Out of School*.

22/J. R. Mercer, "A Policy Statement on Assessment Procedures and the Rights of Children," *Harvard Educational Review* 44, no. 1 (1974): 125-141.

23/M. Stephen Lilly, ed., *Children with Exceptional Needs: A Survey of Special Education* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), pp. 1-58.

24/Elmore.

25/William H. Wilken and David O. Porter, *State Aid for Special Education: Who Benefits?* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, National Institute of Education, 1977), Chapter II.

26/Richard M. Cyert and James G. March, *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 101-113; Elmore, p. 203.

27/In the jargon of anthropology, we attempt to label activities in "emic" or "actor relevant" terms, using the descriptive labels employed by those who actually carry them out. See Pertti J. Pelto, *Anthropological Research: The Structure of Inquiry* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 67-86.

28/Donald R. Moore, "Statement to Subcommittee on Select Education, U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor," November 17, 1980.

29/*Studies of Handicapped Students*, 2 vols. (Menlo Park, Ca.: SRI International, 1975 and 1978), vol. 2: *Teacher Identification of Handicapped Pupils (Ages 6-11) Compared with Identification Using Other Indicators*, by Patricia A. Craig, David H. Kaskowitz, and Mary A. Malgoire.

30/Mercer.

31/In Massachusetts, for instance, a department of education with liberal leadership repeatedly refused to act on this discrimination issue. See Massachusetts Advocacy Center, *Double Jeopardy: The Plight of Minority Children in Special Education* (Boston: Author, 1978), pp. 19-22.

32/*Final Report to the Secretary of the Task Force on Equal Educational Opportunity for Handicapped Children*, by Betsy Levin, Chair (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1980).

33/Marian S. Stearns et al., *Validation of State Counts of Handicapped Children*, vol. 1: *Procedures for Validating State Handicapped Child Counts* (Menlo Park, Ca.: Stanford Research Institute, 1977).

34/Ron Edmonds, "A Discussion of the Literature and Issues Related to Effective Schooling," Harvard University, 1978, (typewritten), p. 37.

35/A number of researchers have documented the futility of attempting to attain comprehensive control over teacher behavior through elaborate systems management schemes. See, for example, Harry Wolcott, *Teachers vs. Technocrats* (Eugene, Ore.: Center for Educational Policy Research, 1977). However, the only alternative to such an approach is not to give up all hope of providing leadership that shapes teacher behavior in critical respects. Rather, service quality will be increased by identifying and implementing a limited number of critical preferred practices.

36/Allison, p. 2.

37/Elmore; Eleanor Farrar, John DeSanctis, and David K. Cohen, "Alternative Conceptions of Implementation," Huron Institute, Cambridge, 1978, (typewritten); Michael W. Kirst, "What Happens at the Local Level after School Finance

Reform?" Policy Analysis 3 (summer 1977): 301-324. Richard Elmore's article has been particularly useful in developing the service quality model.

38/Moore, Child Advocacy.

39/Elmore, p. 191.

40/Lortie, Schoolteacher; Howard Becker, "The Teacher in the Authority System of the Public School," Journal of Educational Sociology 27 (November 1953): 128-141; Ann Liebermann and Lynne Miller, "The Social Realities of Teaching," Teachers College Record 80 (September 1978): 54-68; Seymour B. Sarason, The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971); Wolcott.

41/Wirt and Kirst; Joel Spring, American Education: An Introduction to Social and Political Aspects (New York: Longman, 1978); Mary Frase Williams, ed., Government in the Classroom: Dollars and Power in Education (New York: Academy of Political Science, 1978); Murray Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois, 1964); Stuart A. Scheingold, The Politics of Rights: Lawyers, Public Policy, and Political Change (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1974); Elmore.

42/Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1967); Hugh Mehan and Houston Wood, The Reality of Ethnomethodology (New York: John Wiley, 1975); Muzafer Sherif and Carolyn W. Sherif, An Outline of Social Psychology (New York: Harper and Row, 1956).

43/John Pincus, "Incentives for Innovation in the Public Schools," Review of Educational Research 44 (1974): 113-144; H. Thomas James, James A. Kelly, and Walter I. Grams, "The School Budget Process in Large Cities," in The Politics of Education at the Local, State, and Federal Levels, ed. Michael W. Kirst (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1970), pp. 74-89; Aaron Wildavsky, The Politics of the Budgetary Process, 3rd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979); Donald R. Moore and Arthur A. Hyde, Making Sense of Staff Development: An Analysis of Staff Development Programs and Their Costs in Three Urban School Districts (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, 1981).

44/Elmore, p. 209; Richard Schmuck et al., The Second Handbook of Organization Development in Schools (Palo Alto, Ca.: Mayfield, 1977); Gene E. Hall and Susan Loucks, "Teacher Concern as a Basis for Facilitating and Personalizing Staff Development," Teachers College Record 80 (September 1978): 107-125.

CHAPTER 3. THE STRUCTURE OF THE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM: AN OVERVIEW

In Chapters 4 through 6, we present and analyze the key activities through which the structure of the student classification system is established, students are placed within this structure, and services are provided to them.

As a prelude to this analysis, it is helpful to describe some basic facts about the classification systems that are the center of these processes -- about what we call the _structure_ of the classification system that shapes reading services. The first part of Chapter 3 describes a few basic facts about the two school districts studied, the major overt classification systems employed by each district that are important in shaping the nature of reading instruction, and the numbers of children in each of these classifications.

In the second part of Chapter 3, we introduce the detailed analysis of the classification process that appears in Chapters 4 through 6 by providing an initial overview of this process.

A Few Basic Facts about the Two School Districts

Table 3-1 summarizes a few basic facts about each school district, which are discussed briefly below.

Oak Park District 97

Oak Park is a community of 54,000 immediately adjacent to the West Side of Chicago. Historically, Oak Park has been a solidly middle-class to upper-middle-class white community. Over the past decade, a significant number of black residents have moved in.

Oak Park students in grades K-8 attend the Oak Park Elementary School District (District 97), the focus of our study. Oak Park students in grades 9-12 attend Oak Park-River Forest High School, a regional high school set up as a separate school district.

In 1979-80, the Oak Park Elementary School District served 5,004 students. 3,830 of these students were in grades K-6. Since our study focused on grades K-6, all statistics presented from now on (unless otherwise noted) apply to grades K-6. In grades K-6, the Oak Park student population was 75% Anglo, 18% black, 3% Hispanic, and 4% others. These children attended eight K-6 elementary schools (there are also two junior high schools in the district).

A major issue in the community for the past decade has been the effort of both the local government and the school district to promote patterns of integration that will avoid the large-scale exodus of whites and promote balanced integration across the community's neighborhoods and

Table 3-1. Basic Background Information about the Two School Districts

	OAK PARK DISTRICT 97	ELGIN DISTRICT U-46
COMMUNITIES SERVED	Oak Park	Elgin, South Elgin, Streamwood, Bartlett, Hanover Park, Wayne, and Carol Stream
GRADE STRUCTURE	Kindergarten - 8th	Kindergarten - 12th
TOTAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT	5,004 students	24,603 students
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS	8 elementary (K-6) 2 junior high (7-8)	31 elementary (K-6) 7 junior high (7-8) 3 high school (9-12)
SCHOOL ENROLLMENT K-6	3,830 students	14,237 students
RACIAL COMPOSITION K-6	75% Anglo 18% black 3% Hispanic 4% other	81% Anglo 6% black 10% Hispanic 3% other
% MINORITY IN INDIVIDUAL K-6 SCHOOLS	15% - 31%	5% - 64%

schools. In 1979-80, elementary school attendance ranged between 15% and 31% minority in individual schools. Such integration patterns were maintained by redrawing school attendance boundaries and by busing students to promote integration.

Historically, Oak Park has prided itself on the quality of its schools, and there has almost always been an active group of parents and citizens pressing the school district to maintain present programs and initiate new ones. One manifestation of this activism is the interest of the PTO Council, which aided us in this study, in gathering detailed information about the educational program of the school district.

Reflecting generally strong community support for the schools is the fact that no recent referendum requesting tax increases for education has been defeated (although the last such referendum was in 1976). Despite public support, the school district has faced significant financial pressures as a result of inflation, declining enrollment, and a diminishing tax base, and has been forced to make some limited administrative and program cutbacks in the past three years.

Elgin District U-46

Elgin School District U-46 is located about 50 miles west of Chicago. A K-12 school district, it serves the communities of Elgin, South Elgin, Streamwood, Bartlett, Hanover Park, Wayne, and Carol Stream. Elgin includes sizable groups of blacks, Hispanics, and Asians (primarily Vietnamese and Laotian refugees). The other communities served by District U-46 are predominantly white and suburban or rural in character. In grades K-12, District U-46 (which we will refer to as the Elgin School District) had 24,603 students in 1979-80, making it the third largest school district in Illinois.

Elgin enrolled 14,237 students in grades K-6 in 1979-80 -- more than three-and-one-half times as many as Oak Park. Of these students, 81% were Anglo, 10% Hispanic, 6% black, and 3% other (largely Vietnamese and Laotian). These students attended 31 elementary schools that ranged from 5% to 64% minority. There were also 7 junior high schools and 3 high schools in the school district.

Like Oak Park, Elgin has faced pressures of inflation and declining enrollment, but it has been unable to obtain public support for increased school taxes. We were told that several tax referenda have failed in the past ten years, forcing the district to make significant program cutbacks. For instance, Elgin has cut 65 elementary teachers since 1974, but the number of elementary students has increased by 150.

Administrative Structures of Oak Park and Elgin

The administrative structure of the Oak Park district is depicted in Table 3-2. In 1979-80, the central administration included ten administrators. Note that there were few central office administrators with responsibility for supervising or assisting school-level staff in a specific curricular area. Only the coordinator of reading and language arts, director of special education, and coordinator of math and science had such responsibilities full-time during the period of the study. The math and science position has since been phased out. Thus, Oak Park had a strong emphasis on building-level definition of specific instructional programs.

The administrative structure of the Elgin district is depicted in Table 3-3. Altogether there were 33 central office administrators in Elgin in 1979-80. The major difference in the administrative staffing levels between Elgin and Oak Park resulted from the number of curriculum and program specialists (who reported to the assistant superintendent for curriculum). There were 25 specialists (dealing with such areas as reading, mathematics, bilingual education, staff development, and various aspects of special education) who were part of the central office staff. Proportionately, the ratio of central office administrators to children was actually greater in Oak Park than in Elgin (2.0 administrators for each 100 students in Oak Park and

1.3 administrators for each 100 students in Elgin). However, the fact that most of Elgin's administrators were curriculum and program specialists resulted in somewhat more central office coordination of specific school-level programs.

The Major Classification Systems in the Two Districts

It is convenient to describe the major student classification systems that are especially important in shaping reading instruction under the following headings:

- Student assignment to schools, grades, and homerooms.
- Student classification within the mainstream reading program.
- Student classification for special instructional programs.

Student Assignment to Schools, Grades, and Homerooms

While the process of assigning students to schools, grades, and homerooms may seem so mundane that it is not worth mentioning, these "routine" classification decisions have a critical impact on the nature of reading services provided to children. Mainsteam reading instruction, for instance, varies markedly from school to school depending on whether the principal takes an active role in shaping the instructional program. Some schools offer a variety of special instructional programs that others do not. Thus,

Table 3-2. Administrative Structure of Oak Park School District 97 (K-8)

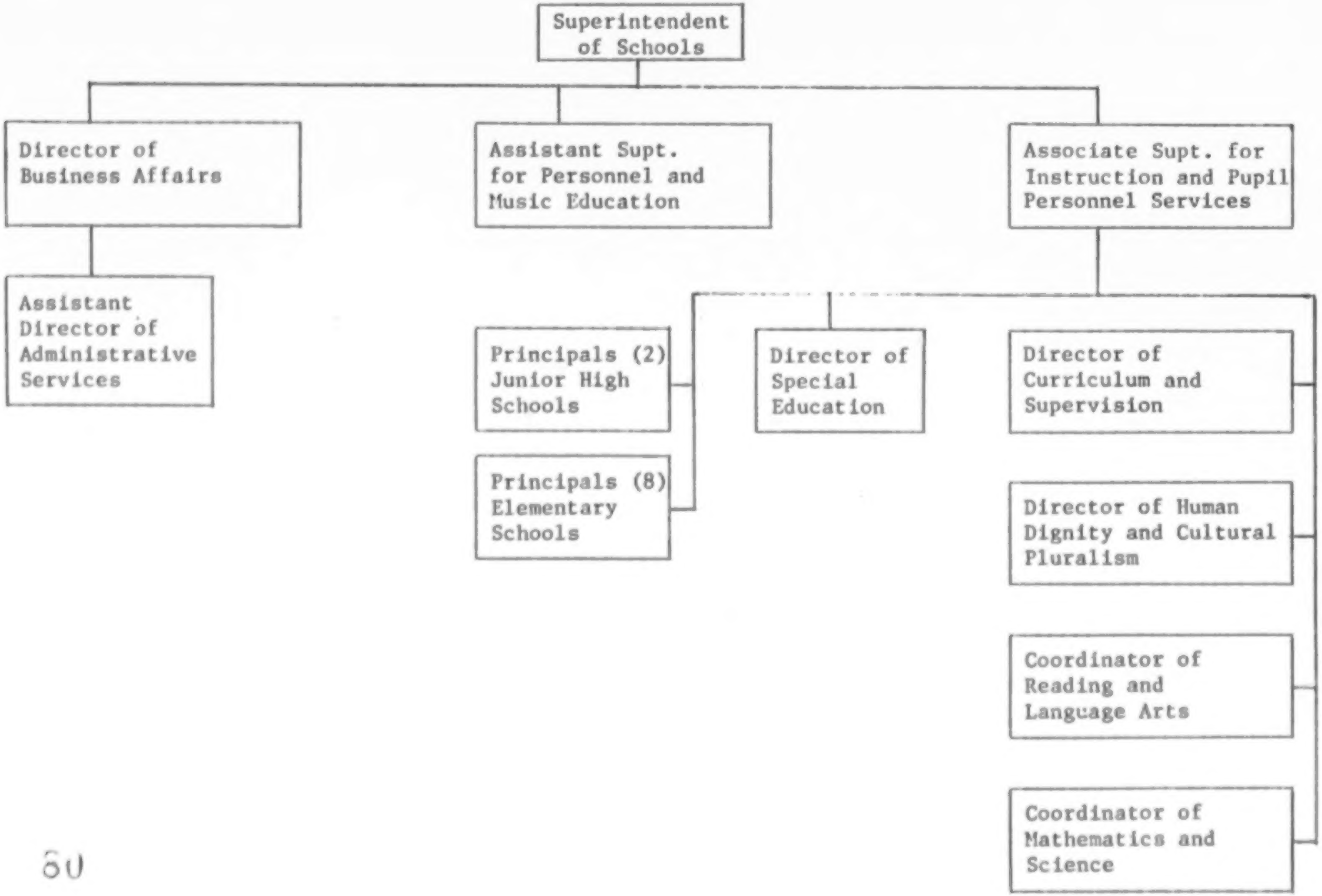
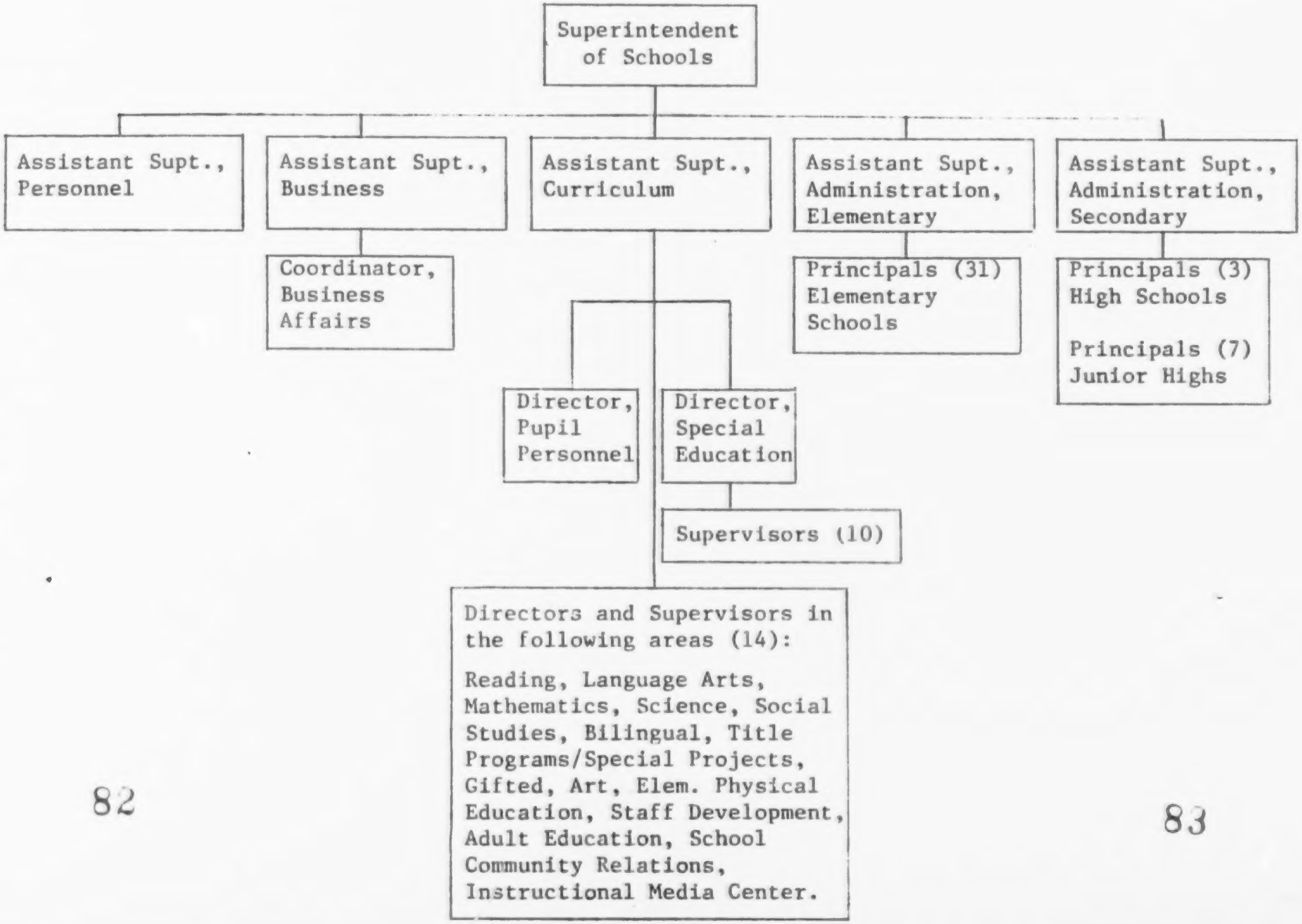

Superintendent of Schools
Director of Business Affairs
Assistant Supt. for Personnel and Music Education
Associate Supt. for Instruction and Pupil Personnel Services
Assistant Director of Administrative Services
Principals (2) Junior High Schools
Principals (8) Elementary Schools
Director of Special Education
Director of Curriculum and Supervision
Director of Human Dignity and Cultural Pluralism
Coordinator of Reading and Language Arts
Coordinator of Mathematics and Science

Table 3-3. Administrative Structure of Elgin School District U-46 (K-12)


Superintendent of Schools
Assistant Supt., Personnel
Assistant Supt., Business
Assistant Supt., Curriculum
Assistant Supt., Administration, Elementary
Assistant Supt., Administration, Secondary
Coordinator, Business Affairs
Principals (31) Elementary Schools
Principals (3) High Schools
Principals (7) Junior Highs
Director, Pupil Personnel
Director, Special Education
Supervisors (10)
Directors and Supervisors in the following areas (14):
Reading, Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Bilingual, Title Programs/Special Projects, Gifted, Art, Elem. Physical Education, Staff Development, Adult Education, School Community Relations, Instructional Media Center.

these basic student assignment procedures that shape the quality of instruction need to be understood in any comprehensive analysis of classification.

Assignment to a School. The policies for assigning students to a school were developed at the school district level. Most children in both districts were assigned to a given school because they resided within its attendance area. These attendance boundaries reflect, by and large, historical neighborhood and community boundaries. Over time, these school attendance districts have been altered in response to fluctuations in population, and, more recently, to facilitate desegregation.

In both Oak Park and Elgin, some students attended elementary schools other than the schools closest to their home. Generally, this was done for one of three reasons: (1) to participate in a special program offered by the more distant school; (2) to promote racial desegregation; or (3) because parents petitioned for a "permissive transfer," which district administrators had the discretion to grant or not to grant.

Both school districts sought, to some extent, to combine the first two reasons for shifting students from their neighborhood schools by locating special programs in a pattern that promoted desegregation. Oak Park located day-care programs attended by many black children in predominantly white schools, while Elgin located bilingual programs in predominantly Anglo schools. In both districts, it was primarily minority students who were bused to attend special programs outside their own neighborhood.

In Oak Park, the school assignment process resulted in schools serving from 337 to 662 students, while in Elgin the school size ranged from 276 to 714 students in spring 1980.

Assignment to school was controlled entirely at the district level. The school district set attendance zones, decided where special programs would be located, decided who would be bused for integration, and handled requests for permissive transfers.

Assignment to a Grade. With a few exceptions, children in both school districts were assigned to separate grade levels based on their date of birth, and they attended classes with children within their own age range. More than 95% of all elementary students in the two districts attended age-segregated classes of this type. Thus, children only a few days different in age were either allowed to enter kindergarten or made to wait an additional year. Further, children normally moved on to a new grade level (and teacher) at the end of each school year.

Rules for assigning children to a grade were implemented at the school level but set at the district level, with only a little discretion granted to the schools in implementing them.

The exceptions to the prevailing student assignment procedure based on the student's age were as follows:

- Some students whose progress was judged poor were held back to repeat a grade.
- In Elgin, some kindergarten students judged too developmentally immature to attend first grade (225 children out of approximately 2,000 in 1979-80) were placed in "Developmental First Grade" (DFG). Most attended this program for one year before entering regular first grade classes.
- In both Elgin and Oak Park, a handful of teachers taught a "split grade" self-contained class consisting of students from two grade levels. Most of these classes were set up for administrative rather than pedagogical reasons, because declining enrollment had produced "bulges" and "depressions" in certain grades, making it difficult to group students into classes of 25 to 30 at each grade level. A few such classrooms reflected a conscious cross-grade team teaching approach.

Assignment to a Homeroom Teacher. All children were assigned to a homeroom teacher. For children who spent full time in a special education program, their special education teacher was their homeroom teacher. Otherwise, the child was assigned to a "regular homeroom" that was heterogeneous in reading achievement and was headed by a mainstream classroom teacher. Some homeroom teachers took sole responsibility for instructing their homeroom in all major subjects, while others collaborated to some degree with other homeroom teachers. Of those who collaborated, many did so in a minimal way by sending some students to other teachers for instruction, but they did not plan collaboratively with the receiving teachers. Others were part of a teaching team that planned collaboratively and, in rare instances, co-taught in the same classroom.

Thus, when students were assigned to homerooms, they were also assigned, as a result, to either a teacher who ran a self-contained classroom or a teacher who collaborated with others, and the nature of instruction varied as a result. About 40% of the mainstream classroom teachers in Elgin and Oak Park did not collaborate in any way with other mainstream classroom teachers. About 35% of the Elgin teachers and 45% of the Oak Park teachers collaborated minimally by regrouping students and sending them to other teachers for specific subjects. About 25% of the Elgin teachers and 15% of the Oak Park teachers were part of a teaching team that collaborated on instructional planning and, in some cases, co-teaching.

Approximately 78% of the elementary students in Oak Park and 86% of the elementary students in Elgin received their reading instruction entirely through the mainstream program, and thus were taught reading by their homeroom teacher or by the other mainstream classroom teachers with whom their homeroom teacher collaborated (see Table 3-4). The remainder of the students assigned to regular homeroom teachers received some combination of mainstream reading

Table 3-4. Number and Percentage of Students Receiving Various Configurations of Reading Services in Grades K-6

SERVICES	OAK PARK*	ELGIN*
Total receiving reading instruction within the mainstream program only	2,987 (78.0%)	12,270 (86.2%)
Mainstream reading plus special education resource that is reading-related	204 (5.3%)	360 (2.5%)**
Mainstream reading plus bilingual	none	320 (2.2%)
Mainstream reading plus ESL	50 (1.3%)	50 (.3%)***
Mainstream reading plus Title I	150 (3.9%)	621 (4.4%)**
Mainstream reading plus remedial reading	343 (9.0%)	none
Special education self-contained	96 (2.5%)	679 (4.8%)
Total receiving some form of reading-related special service	843 (22.0%)	1,967 (13.8%)

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*Percentages are of K-6 student total.

**Includes 63 students who receive both Title I and Learning Disabilities resource services.

***Estimate based on interviews. No exact number obtained.

instruction and reading instruction provided by a remedial reading, Title I, special education, English-as-a-Second-Language, or bilingual education teacher.

School district policies and customary practice played an important role in shaping the assignment of students to homerooms. Each district set a maximum and minimum number of children who could be assigned to a homeroom. In Oak Park, the school district required that homerooms be heterogeneous by reading achievement; in Elgin heterogeneous homerooms were not formally required, but this was the generally accepted practice. Within these limits, school principals had the authority to decide teachers' grade level assignments and to place particular students in particular homerooms. Some principals made these decisions largely on their own; others sought teacher input or delegated these decisions to the teachers who taught a particular grade level. Principals and teachers involved in making these homeroom placements said that they took into account such factors as reading achievement level, sex, race, personality, leadership ability, behavior, and whether the child would function better with a particular teacher or teaching team. In some cases, principals took parent recommendations into account.

Student Classification within the Mainstream Reading Program

As noted above, apparently "routine" student assignment procedures have the potential to put children in schools, at grade levels, and in regular classrooms with widely varying approaches to reading instruction. Once these basic assignment decisions have been made, the child's reading instruction experience is then further shaped by assignment to a reading level and to a reading group.

Assignment to a Reading Level. Children receiving mainstream reading instruction were almost always placed at one of the "levels" in the major reading program employed by the school district (i.e., either the Holt program in Elgin or the Houghton Mifflin program in Oak Park). This placement decision was usually made by the homeroom teacher, either for the purpose of working with children in a self-contained homeroom or for the purpose of regrouping children in collaboration with other teachers. The information weighed in assigning students to a reading level varied significantly between school districts, schools, and teachers, as will be discussed in Chapter 5. Placement was based to varying degrees on achievement testing, diagnostic testing, recommendations from the previous year's teacher, other information in the student's record, and/or current observations of the child's reading performance in class.

In reflecting on the assigned reading levels of children in their classes, many mainstream teachers we interviewed spoke of having three types of students: "low" students, who were reading below the norm for their grade level, "average" students who were reading at or near the norm, and "high" students reading above the norm.

Assignment to a Reading Group. Once children were assigned to a reading level, the teacher responsible for teaching reading to a child in the mainstream reading program generally subdivided those at a particular reading level into smaller reading groups consisting of children who worked on the same instructional material at the same time.

Through this series of related decisions -- assignment to a school, assignment to a grade, assignment to a homeroom, assignment to a reading level, assignment to a reading group -- thousands of children were subdivided into groups of five to ten for instruction in reading within the mainstream program.

Student Classification for Reading-Related Special Instructional Programs

As Table 3-4 indicates, a substantial number of students attending the two school systems were classified as needing additional or different reading-related services. In Oak Park, the major programs that provided reading instruction outside the mainstream program were remedial reading, Title I, English-as-a-Second-Language, and selected special education programs. In Elgin, the major programs involved were Title I, English-as-a-Second-Language, bilingual education, and selected special education programs.

The total percentage of students receiving reading instruction through these special programs varied significantly between the two school districts. In Oak Park, 78% of K-6 students were receiving reading instruction entirely within the mainstream program, while 22% were receiving some form of reading instruction outside the mainstream program that either supplemented or replaced the mainstream program. In Elgin, 86% of K-6 students were receiving reading instruction entirely within the mainstream program, while 14% were receiving some form of instruction outside the mainstream program. The largest single contributor to the difference between the two districts was the fact that 9% of Oak Park students received remedial reading services, while Elgin had no remedial reading program (other differences are discussed below).

Below, we briefly describe the nature of each special program offering reading instruction, the formal reasons that students were placed in each, and the numbers of students assigned to each. (As will be made clear in Chapter 5, formal reasons for placement in these programs do not fully describe the reasons that children were actually assigned to them.)

Special Education. According to federal and state laws, special education programs and services are to be provided to all students residing within the two school districts who are judged to exhibit one or more specified handicapping conditions. Under the federal law, children who are to be served include all children who are "mentally retarded, hard of hearing, deaf, speech impaired, visually handicapped, seriously emotionally disturbed, orthopedically impaired, other health impaired, deaf-blind, multi-handicapped, or having specific learning disabilities." The federal law provides general definitions of each handicapping condition. With modest differences, Illinois law lays out similar definitions.1/

Districts are required to maintain a continuum of alternative placements for dealing with these conditions that, in general terms, ranges from supplementary help provided to children who continue spending most of their time in the mainstream classroom to entirely separate special education programs. The law requires that districts provide services in ways that, to the greatest extent possible, maximize contact with the mainstream instructional program.

Children with severe handicapping conditions that fit one of these definitions were generally referred for assessment by their parent or were identified through early screening by the school districts. Most others who were classified as handicapped were referred by classroom teachers who perceived behavior or reading problems and suspected a handicap. Once children were referred, they proceeded through a process of prelimary assessment, a more extensive assessment, and finally placement -- if the initial referral for assessment was supported by subsequent assessment decisions (this decision-making process will be analyzed in detail in Chapter 5). 12.9% of the K-6 students in Oak Park and 12.5% of the K-6 students in Elgin were classified as handicapped through these procedures. Of these students, 5.1% of Oak Park students and 5.0% of the Elgin students received speech instruction in a resource program, an activity that we did not consider to be supplementary to reading instruction. The numbers and percentages of students in each major special education classification are presented in Table 3-5.

7.8% of Oak Park students and 7.3% of Elgin students received some form of reading instruction outside the mainstream program through special education (see Table 3-5).

Despite the similarities in these overall percentages, more detailed analyses of the numbers of students in

Table 3-5. Number and Percentage of Students Participating in Special Education in Grades K-6

SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICE	OAK PARK*			ELGIN*		
	Resrc. Service	Self-contnd.	Total	Resrc. Service	Self-contnd.	Total
Learning Disabled (LD)	204 (5.3%)	22 (.6%)	226 (5.9%)	355 (2.5%)	375** (2.6%)	730 (5.1%)
Educable Mentally Handicapped (EMH)	---	19 (.5%)	19 (.5%)	4 ***	139 (1.0%)	143 (1.0%)
Behavior Disordered (BD)	---	18 (.5%)	18 (.5%)	1 ***	65 (.5%)	66 (.5%)
Speech Impaired (SI)	196 (5.1%)	---	196 (5.1%)	710 (5.0%)	49 (.3%)	759 (5.3%)
Other handicaps	---	37 (.9%)	37 (.9%)	26 (.2%)	51 (.4%)	77 (.6%)
Total	400 (10.4%)	96 (2.5%)	496 (12.9%)	1,096 (7.7%)	679 (4.8%)	1,775 (12.5%)
Total receiving reading-related instruction through special education****	204 (5.3%)	96 (2.5%)	300 (7.8%)	360 (2.5%)	679 (4.8%)	1,039 (7.3%)

---

*Percentages are of K-6 student population.

**Includes 235 students in Developmental First Grade classes (1.6% of K-6 students).

***Less than .1%.

****LD, EMH, and BD resource services, as well as all self-contained special education programs are considered reading-related.

reading-related special education programs reveal some substantial differences between the two districts. In Table 3-5, we indicate how many students involved in special education were served through resource rooms as compared with self-contained special education classes and schools. Elgin served 4.8% of its total K-6 student body in self-contained special education classes, while Oak Park served 2.5% of its students this way. This difference resulted in part from differences in LD programs. Oak Park served 5.3% of all students through LD resource rooms, while only 2.5% of Elgin students were served through LD resource. While Oak Park made limited use of self-contained LD classrooms, Elgin served 2.6% of all its students in self-contained LD classes. This included 206 students (1.6% of K-6 students) in Developmental First Grade classes; these classes were funded by the state as self-contained LD classes.

Another difference between the districts was that Elgin had assigned 1.0% of its students to self-contained EMH classes, while Oak Park served only .5% in this way.

Table 3-6 analyzes the racial and ethnic composition of three special education programs that have historically contained disproportionate numbers of minority students in some school districts: programs for Learning Disabled, Educable Mentally Handicapped, and Behavior Disordered students. In Oak Park, the most noticeable racial disproportion occurred in the comparison of Anglo and black students in EMH and BD classes, where the rate of assignment to these classes was about four times greater for black than for Anglo students. It was also true, however, that Oak Park's absolute percentage of black students assigned to EMH was among the lowest in the state and that the number of students involved in Oak Park's EMH and BD classes was small, so that a shift of a few pupils could affect rates of assignment by race substantially.

In Elgin, there were significant disproportions in assignment to special education, and the percentage of black students receiving LD and EMH services was much higher in Elgin than in Oak Park. The percentage of black students in LD programs (10.2%) was twice the percentage for Anglo students. The percentage of black students in EMH programs (5.2%) was eight times the percentage for Anglo students. The overall percentage of black students receiving LD, EMH, and BD services (16.1%) was almost three times the percentage for Anglo students.

A further breakdown of special education data by race and by assignment to resource versus self-contained placement also indicated racial disproportion in Elgin. While 3.1% of Anglo students were assigned to self-contained LD, EMH, and BD classes, 12.1% of black students in Elgin were assigned to these self-contained classes. This disproportion resulted primarily from the greater

Table 3-6. Number and Percentage of K-6 Students Classified as Learning Disabled, Educable Mentally Handicapped, and Behavior Disordered by Ethnic Group

	OAK PARK				ELGIN			
SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICE	ANGLO (as a % of total Anglo stud. pop'n)	BLACK (as a % of total black stud. pop'n)	HISP./OTHER* (as a % of Hisp./other stud. pop'n)	TOTAL (as a % of total K-6 stud. pop'n)	ANGLO (as a % of total Anglo stud. pop'n)	BLACK (as a % of total black stud. pop'n)	HISP./OTHER* (as a % of Hisp./other stud. pop'n)	TOTAL (as a % of total K-6 stud. pop'n)
Learning Disabled (LD)	179 (6.3%)	38 (5.3%)	9 (3.5%)	226 (5.9%)	555 (4.8%)	91 (10.2%)	84 (4.8%)	730 (5.1%)
Educable Mentally Handicapped (EMH)	10 (.3%)	8 (1.1%)	1 (.4%)	19 (.5%)	70 (.6%)	46 (5.2%)	27 (1.5%)	143 (1.0%)
Behavior Disordered (BD)	9 (.3%)	9 (1.3%)	---	18 (.5%)	58 (.5%)	6 (.7%)	2 (.1%)	66 (.5%)
Total, three handicaps	198 (6.9%)	55 (7.7%)	10 (3.9%)	263 (6.9%)	683 (5.9%)	143 (16.1%)	113 (6.4%)	939 (6.6%)

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*In Oak Park elementary schools there were 105 Hispanic students (2.8%) and 151 students of other minority groups (3.9%); in Elgin elementary schools there were 1,378 Hispanic students (9.7%) and 374 students of other minority groups (2.6%).

proportions of black children in self-contained LD and EMH classes.

Title I. Title I is the largest federal program providing funds to local school districts. In 1979-80, the Title I Program allocated funds according to the number of low-income students residing within the district, as compared with other districts. A district was required to spend the Title I funds in those schools where the percentage of low-income children was above the district average. Within these "Title I schools," children served by the Title I program had to be "educationally deprived." Typically, children judged educationally deprived were those substantially behind in reading. The school district conducted a needs assessment to determine the priority needs of "educationally deprived" students in the target schools and then provided services to meet these needs, within the limits of the available funds. The stated federal intent behind these regulations was to concentrate limited funds on those schools and those children who most needed special help and to insure that the resulting school-level programs were of sufficient scope to have a chance to affect student progress.2/

Since the federal funding level for Title I has never approached the amount of money needed to provide substantial special help to all the educationally deprived children in the target schools, the school districts had to decide how to concentrate the Title I resources on certain "educationally deprived" students within the target schools. In both Oak Park and Elgin, the Title I funds were used to hire reading specialists who were assigned to the Title I schools and who provided pullout help to children behind in reading.

In Elgin, the Title I program paid the salary of a full-time reading specialist for each of twelve Title I target schools. Within these schools, the program provided pullout help on a daily basis for about 570 students. Because of the limited resources available, Elgin decided to focus the program on children in the second and third grades with reading problems. Each Title I school had its own system for selecting these students. In some schools, all children were tested for potential referral; in others, mainstream classroom teachers referred students they believed needed help, and these students were further evaluated by the Title I teacher.

In Oak Park, the Title I program operating in the elementary schools supported half-time teachers in five elementary schools. The Title I teacher provided help on a pullout basis to children with reading problems as part of a plan that was coordinated with the school's remedial reading teacher. For example, in some schools the Title I and remedial reading teachers were responsible for different grade levels; in others, the Title I teacher took children with relatively less severe problems while the remedial reading teacher saw those children with more severe problems. In some Oak Park schools, Title I teachers also worked on language arts. In all, 150 students were served by the Oak Park Title I teachers at the elementary level.

English-as-a-Second-Language and Bilingual Education. Both Elgin and Oak Park have substantial groups of students who come from families where the primary language spoken is not English.

In the early 1970s, both districts responded to the educational needs of these children by establishing English-as-a-Second-Language programs (ESL programs). Characteristically, these were pullout programs in which the ESL teacher attempted to teach the child English, and it was not considered essential that the ESL teacher speak the child's native language. In Oak Park, ESL was the only program designed to meet the special needs of linguistically different children at the time of our data collection. There were ESL teachers in seven of the eight elementary schools serving a total of 50 students.

Elgin also provided some ESL instruction. However, it assisted linguistically different students primarily through its "transitional bilingual program." According to Illinois law, any school district with an attendance center (school) enrolling more than twenty linguistically different students from the same linguistic background (e.g., twenty or more students who speak Spanish) must offer a transitional bilingual program. This program is to consist of instruction in the major academic subjects provided in the child's native language, as well as instruction designed to build proficiency in English. The intent is to maintain children's academic progress in their native language while teaching them to speak, read, and write in English.3/

At the time of our research, state law defined six levels of English proficiency as follows:

I. The student does not speak, understand, or write English but may know a few isolated words or expressions.

II. The student understands simple English if it is spoken slowly but he does not speak English, except in isolated instances.

III. The student speaks and understands English with hesitancy and difficulty. With effort and help he can carry on a conversation.

IV. The student speaks and understands English without apparent difficulty but displays low achievement -- indicating language or cultural interference. (An accent or limited vocabulary should be disregarded.)

V. The student speaks and understands both English and the home language without difficulty and shows normal academic achievement for his grade level.

VI. The student predominantly or exclusively speaks English.

School districts were required to assess how many children were functioning at each of these levels and to provide bilingual education to children at Levels I-III and in some instances to those at Level IV. Districts decided for themselves what testing instruments and testing procedures would be employed to make these decisions.

In Elgin, the bilingual program consisted of a half-day experience in a mainstream classroom and a half-day experience in a bilingual program. As mentioned earlier, bilingual programs were housed in mostly white middle-class schools to enhance desegregation, so that children judged to need bilingual education were transferred to one of these schools, frequently along with their siblings. Six of 31 elementary schools in Elgin offered a total of seventeen half-day bilingual classes serving 320 K-6 children in all. Fifteen classes served Hispanic children, one served Vietnamese children, and one served Laotian children.

In addition to the three language groups participating in the bilingual program, children speaking ten additional languages were enrolled in Elgin elementary schools. About 50 children classified as linguistically different who spoke these languages received ESL instruction.

Remedial Reading. Although all of the special programs described above provide elements of what has traditionally been considered remedial reading, only Oak Park operated, in addition, a distinct remedial reading program.

The remedial reading program in Oak Park functioned in all eight elementary schools. A full-time reading specialist in each school had flexibility in defining his/her responsibilities, but a major portion of each specialist's job was to provide supplementary reading help on a pullout basis to students with reading problems. Children served through this supplementary reading instruction are initially referred by individual teachers. To qualify for help, the remedial reading specialist had to determine that they were one year below grade level if they were in grades one and two, and two years below grade level in grades three and above. Altogether, 343 students, or 9% of the K-6 enrollment in Oak Park, were served through remedial reading pullout programs.

In addition to providing direct instruction to students with reading problems, reading specialists in some schools took an active role in developing the school's mainstream reading progran in collaboration with mainstream classroom teachers, and also oversaw the work of the Title I teacher.

Overlaps Between Programs Providing Reading Instruction Outside the Mainstream Program. It is possible that a child receiving one type of special help may be receiving another type; for instance, a child who is both Spanish-dominant and handicapped or a child classified as LD who is also eligible for Title I. Educators in both districts referred to this situation as "double-serving." In Oak Park, there were almost no children participating in two programs that provided reading instruction outside the mainstream program. In Elgin, the only appreciable instance of double-serving in these reading-related programs was for 63 students (.4% of K-6 students) who participated in both Title I and LD resource classes. In both districts, staff norms discouraged double-serving.

Differences Between School Districts in the Configuration of Reading Instruction Services

Returning to Table 3-4, one can appreciate some contrasts between the way that reading instruction services were provided in Oak Park and Elgin. Oak Park served 8.2% fewer students solely through the mainstream program than does Elgin. In large part, this difference resulted from the existence of remedial reading specialists in each Oak Park school. However, it was also true that Elgin served Hispanic and Asian students through bilingual programs that Oak Park lacked. While each district had about the same percentage of students in special education, Elgin served a higher proportion of these students through self-contained classes while Oak Park assigned a higher proportion to resource services. Elgin also assigned a higher proportion of its black students to special education, as compared with its Anglo students (see Table 3-6). Further, of those students assigned to special education, a higher proportion of black than of Anglo students were assigned to self-contained classes.

The districts had differing options for placement in special programs available at the school level. In Oak Park, if teachers believed a child needed special reading help, they had remedial reading placements and LD resource placements available in each school, as well as Title I placements available in half the schools. In Elgin, if a child was not eligible for the bilingual program and was not in a Title I school, the only option the teacher had available was either to refer the child for special education or to keep the child in the mainstream classroom. Because fewer resource placements were available in Elgin than in Oak Park, the child referred for special education was more likely to end up in a self-contained LD, EMH, or BD program. Since Elgin required that a child assigned to LD must score 85 or more on an IQ test, children scoring lower than 85 either had to be placed in EMH or kept in the mainstream classroom in many schools.

Three Groups of Classification-Related Activities

Above, we have provided some basic facts about the classification systems in each school district, a kind of snapshot of the structure of the classification system. But what actions at the federal, state, and local level create this system? And how does the system work in practice to place students in various categories and to serve these students?

These questions can be productively explored through the application of the service quality model described in Chapter 2. Viewed from the standpoint of the service quality model, the educational system carries out a series of key activities and sub-activities related to student classification and reading that shape the nature of services to students. As explained in Chapter 2, specific activities and sub-activities are recurring patterns of behavior in the system, defined in the terms commonly used by those who carry them out. The level of detail at which activities and sub-activities are described is the one we judge most useful in analyzing a particular aspect of services to children with an eye toward improving service quality.

As a result of our research, we have identified a set of key activities that shape reading-related student classification, which are presented in Table 3-7. As Table 3-7 indicates, we found two useful ways of grouping these activities to understand them better. First, the activities fall into three clusters, which are as follows:

Activity Cluster A.	Establishing the structure for providing services to students, including related classification systems.
Activity Cluster B.	Assessing and placing students.
Activity Cluster C.	Coordinating and providing instruction.

Second, these key activities are carried out at the federal, state, school district, school, and classroom levels, and it is useful to discuss the key activities in each cluster according to the level at which they are carried out.

The three clusters of activities are closely interlinked. For example, establishing the structure for providing services to students shapes the activities through which students are assessed and placed; the activities for coordinating service provision after it is underway are so closely related to the activities for establishing the structure that distinguishing between the two is often arbitrary. Nevertheless, it is useful to present our major findings under these three headings. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 deal respectively with each of these three activity clusters, thus presenting our basic findings about the prevailing practices that shape student classification and related opportunities to learn to read. Each chapter provides a list of key activities falling into the cluster being described that also includes examples of related sub-activities (see Tables 4-1, 5-1, and 6-1).

As noted in Chapter 1, we do not, in these chapters, attempt to present all our conclusions about how each individual activity is carried out; we limit ourselves to the most important conclusions about each cluster of activities that have the greatest relevance to the objective of improving service quality. Further, it is impractical to recount the analytical process of collecting data,

Table 3-7. Key Activities That Shape Student Classification and Reading Instruction

	ACTIVITY CLUSTER A Establishing the structure for providing services to students, including related classification systems	ACTIVITY CLUSTER B Assessing and placing students	ACTIVITY CLUSTER C Coordinating and providing instruction
FEDERAL AND STATE LEVELS	A-1. Establishing relevant laws, regulations, and grant programs. A-2. Rendering judicial decisions. A-3. Allocating federal and state funds. A-4. Enforcing federal and state requirements.	B-1. Establishing federal and state requirements concerning the process of classification. B-2. Enforcing federal and state requirements concerning the process of classification.	C-1. Establishing federal and state requirements concerning the instructional process and the coordination of instruction. C-2. Enforcing federal and state requirements concerning the instructional process and the coordination of instruction.
SCHOOL DISTRICT LEVEL	A-5. Estimating school district revenues. A-6. Establishing school district needs and related expenditures. A-7. Appointing district-level and school-level administrators. A-8. Planning the mainstream reading program, including staff roles and coordination responsibilities. A-9. Planning special instructional programs, including staff roles and coordination responsibilities.	B-3. Establishing and implementing policies for assigning students to schools, grades, and homerooms. B-4. Establishing and implementing policies for assessing and placing students within the mainstream reading program. B-5. Establishing and implementing policies for referring, assessing, and placing students in special instructional programs.	C-3. Coordinating between central office staff who are responsible for mainstream reading and for special instructional programs. C-4. Coordinating instruction in the mainstream reading program, including related staff development. C-5. Coordinating instruction in individual special programs, including related staff development.
SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM LEVELS	A-10. Planning the mainstream reading program, including staff roles and coordination responsibilities. A-11. Planning special instructional programs, including staff roles and coordination responsibilities.	B-6. Assigning students to grades and classrooms. B-7. Assessing and placing students in the mainstream reading program. B-8. Referring students for special program assessment. B-9. Assessing and placing students in special instructional programs.	C-6. Coordinating among school staff who carry out mainstream reading and special instructional programs. C-7. Coordinating instruction in the mainstream reading program, including related staff development. C-8. Coordinating instruction in individual special programs, including related staff development. C-9. Providing instruction in the mainstream reading program. C-10. Providing instruction in individual special programs.

developing propositions, and so on that led us to reach each conclusion. We have described our research methods in Chapter 1. Our objective in writing these chapters has been to explain our major conclusions as clearly as possible. We use examples from the two school districts and conclusions and examples from other research to clarify our explanations. However, the examples are meant to illustrate our conclusions, not to "prove" them.

Notes

1/*The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, U.S. Code*, vol. 20, sec. 1401 et. seg. (1975), (Public law 94-142); Illinois, *The School Code of Illinois* (1979), chap. 122, art. 14.

2/*Elementary and Secondary Education Act, U.S. Code*, sec. 241(a) et. seg. (1965), (Title I).

3/Illinois, *The School Code of Illinois* (1979), chap. 122, art. 14C.

CHAPTER 4. ACTIVITY CLUSTER A.
ESTABLISHING THE STRUCTURE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES

By the time children start school each year, a series of planning decisions have been made about the ways in which the services offered to them will be structured. The basic school district programs and related student classifications described in Chapter 3 have been established (or more typically reaffirmed based on previous practice) and the numbers of staff members and children who will be assigned to each program at the beginning of the school year has been determined.

But why have particular student classifications been established rather than others? And why have certain numbers of teachers and other professional staff been assigned to work with children placed in various classifications? Such questions are illuminated by analyzing the cluster of key activities that establishes the structure for providing services to children, including related classification systems. The key activities that are entailed in this process are listed in Table 4-1, along with some examples of related sub-activities. (Below, we will refer to this group of activities as activities for "establishing the structure of services.")

This initial structure is created by activities at the federal, state, school district, school, and classroom levels. We do not wish to imply that this process is a unidirectional one flowing from the federal level down; activities carried out at various levels interact in complex ways. However, it is instructive to examine some key activities carried out at each of the levels in turn, starting with the federal and state levels.

We concentrate on those features of the key activities we found most important in determining the quality of reading services provided to students.

Federal and State Activities That Establish the Structure of Services

Four federal and state activities are critical in establishing the structure of services that initially confronts children in schools and classrooms:

A-1. Establishing relevant laws, regulations, and grant programs.

A-2. Rendering judicial decisions.

A-3. Allocating federal and state funds.

A-4. Enforcing federal and state requirements.

Establishing Relevant Laws, Regulations, and Grant Programs; Rendering Judicial Decisions

In Table 4-2, we summarize some of the major federal and state laws and court decisions that help shape local classification systems. As we proceed with the analysis, we will emphasize many instances in which the configuration of

Table 4-1. Key Activities and Examples of Sub-Activities in Activity Cluster A: Establishing the Structure for Providing Services to Students, Including Related Classification Systems

FEDERAL AND STATE LEVELS

A-1. Establishing relevant laws, regulations, and grant programs. Includes such sub-activities as:

A-1.1 Holding committee hearings prior to votes on legislation.

A-1.2 Developing and issuing for public comment proposed regulations to interpret laws.

A-1.3 Reviewing grant applications.

A-2. Rendering judicial decisions. Includes such sub-activities as:

A-2.1 Ruling on whether plaintiffs have legal standing to bring a lawsuit.

A-2.2 Reviewing written and oral arguments to render a decision.

A-2.3 Specifying the mechanisms by which the court's decision will be enforced.

A-3. Allocating federal and state funds. Includes such sub-activities as:

A-3.1 Determining distribution formulas for general state aid to local school districts.

A-3.2 Setting annual funding levels for categorical federal programs.

A-4. Enforcing federal and state requirements. Includes such sub-activities as:

A-4.1 Developing agency work plans that specify priority compliance issues and the actions that will be carried out to investigate these issues.

A-4.2 Conducting site visits to local school districts to investigate compliance.

A-4.3 Reviewing requests for reimbursement from local school districts and providing reimbursement.

A-4.4 Ruling on requests to hold school districts in contempt of court and specifying related enforcement steps.

(Table 4-1 continued)

SCHOOL DISTRICT LEVEL

A-5. Estimating school district revenues. Includes such sub-activities as:

- A-5.1 Estimating local property tax revenues for the coming year.
- A-5.2 Estimating general state aid for the coming year.
- A-5.3 Estimating state and federal categorical funds available for the coming year.

A-6. Establishing school district needs and related expenditures. Includes such sub-activities as:

- A-6.1 Gathering data about the number of students needing particular special services.
- A-6.2 Negotiating the provisions of the teachers' contract concerning salary level, class size, etc.
- A-6.3 Allocating unrestricted local and state funds to specific programs.
- A-6.4 Determining overall staffing levels for special instructional programs.

A-7. Appointing district-level and school-level administrators. Includes such sub-activities as:

- A-7.1 Developing qualification requirements for administrative positions.
- A-7.2 Reviewing the qualifications of applicants.

A-8. Planning the mainstream reading program, including staff roles and coordination responsibilities. Includes such sub-activities as:

- A-8.1 Clarifying the relationship between central office specialists and building principals in directing the mainstream reading program.
- A-8.2 Deciding which aspects of the instructional process will be mandated at the district level.

(Table 4-1 continued)

A-9. Planning special instructional programs, including staff roles and coordination responsibilities. Includes such sub-activities as:

  A-9.1 Assigning special program teachers to specific schools.

  A-9.2 Developing role definitions for special program teachers.

  A-9.3 Deciding how to serve students who have multiple problems that cut across individual special programs.

SCHOOL LEVEL

A-10. Planning the mainstream reading program, including staff roles and coordination responsibilities. Includes such sub-activities as:

  A-10.1 Assigning mainstream teachers to grade levels.

  A-10.2 Assigning students to homerooms.

  A-10.3 Specifying the extent of collaboration expected between mainstream teachers in regrouping students for reading instruction.

A-11. Planning special instructional programs, including staff roles and coordination responsibilities. Includes such sub-activities as:

  A-11.1 Defining the responsibilities of special teachers to collaborate with mainstream teachers.

  A-11.2 Specifying the process of student referral for special programs assessment that will be followed in the school.

Table 4-2. Some Key Federal and State Legislation and Court Decisions That Shape Local Classification Systems and Related Services in Illinois

FEDERAL LEVEL

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
Required that no person could, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of or be discriminated against in any program (including schools) receiving federal financial assistance.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965
Provided local school districts with funds to expand and improve their educational programs serving children from low-income families and supported a variety of other school reform projects.

1968 Amendments to the Vocational Education Act of 1963
Recognized the special needs of students with academic, socioeconomic, or other handicaps preventing them from succeeding in regular vocational education programs.

Bilingual Education Act (Title VII of ESEA), 1968
Provided funds to local school districts to voluntarily develop and implement model programs to meet the needs of pupils with limited English-speaking ability between ages 3 and 18. Programs were to provide bilingual instruction and a knowledge of the culture associated with the language.

PARC v. Pennsylvania, 1972
Required that all retarded children in Pennsylvania from ages 6 to 21 be provided with an appropriate publicly supported education.

Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973
Required that "no otherwise qualified handicapped individual . . . shall solely by reason of his handicap be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."

Lau v. Nichols, 1974
Required that all school districts receiving federal funds take steps to rectify language deficiency in order to open instructional programs to all students. Left open the questions of what types of programs should be initiated.

Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1974
Provided that a local school district which "fails to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by its students in its instructional programs" is in violation of the act.

(Table 4-2 continued)

Public Law 94-142: Education for All
Handicapped Children Act, 1975
Mandated a free appropriate public education for all handicapped children between ages 3 and 18. Also provided for due process hearings in the evaluation and placement of students. Provided partial fixed reimbursement for the education of each handicapped child served by a district.

STATE LEVEL, ILLINOIS

Article 14 of The School Code of Illinois. Handicapped Children (major provisions passed in 1965 with amendments up to 1979)
Provided handicapped children with the right to a free appropriate public education and included provisions similar to the federal law, PL 94-142. Provided a maximum of $6,250 reimbursement for each special education staff member, as well as 80% of the cost of transporting handicapped children.

Article 14C of The School Code of Illinois.
Transitional Bilingual Education, 1973
Required that any school district with schools having twenty or more children with limited English-speaking ability who share a common language background receive a program of transitional bilingual education. These programs must provide at least 90 minutes of instruction a day in the child's native language. The state agreed to reimburse districts for a percentage of their excess costs for operating this program, a percentage set by the state legislature each year.

local services differs from the letter or the intent of these laws. However, it should be emphasized that these laws do have a major effect in determining the quality of services at the local level in districts like Elgin and Oak Park, including the ways in which students are classified. In several instances, local activities responsive to federal and state mandates were the only organized local efforts that we could identify responding to the needs of a particular group of children at risk.

> Example. The state of Illinois requires that when twenty non-English speakers of a particular language attend a school, the school district is required to provide a transitional bilingual program for them. Elgin provided such a program for Hispanic students. This was the only program functioning in the district to assist Hispanic students who had difficulty speaking English, despite the fact that many district administrators and teachers expressed concern about Hispanic children who were not in the program, but who experienced language-related difficulties in school. While there were individual teachers and administrators attempting to cope with these students' problems on an individual basis outside the bilingual program, there were no other organized programs at the school district or school level aimed at helping these students in addition to the state-mandated program.1/

> Example. Also in Elgin, the only remedial reading services available to low-income children (or in fact to any children unless they were classified as handicapped) were provided through the federal Title I program.

In such instances, federal and state policies clearly resulted in a net gain in service quality. Certain categories of students had been singled out as needing services responsive to special needs and services had been provided in a situation where no other organized effort to meet these needs was in place. As we will see later, both classification and instruction for these programs had distinct shortcomings, but the federal and state mandates had at least prompted an organized attempt to meet special needs when no other organized effort to meet these needs existed. In light of our service quality standards, they at least reflected an organized attempt to try to meet special needs.

Allocating Funds

The rules by which state and federal funds are allocated for specific programs and the amounts that are allocated each year constitute another substantial federal and state influence on service quality felt at the local level. Local school district administrators, in deciding whether to increase the level of services provided to a particular group of children (e.g., children with severe learning disabilities) weigh a variety of financial and non-financial considerations, including their personal values and priorities, the vigor of state-level enforcement, the extent of community pressure to increase particular services, the amount of extra money that will be provided by the state or federal government if local services are increased, and the amount of extra local money that the school district will have to put up to gain federal and state funds. Thus, local school officials constantly make "trade-off" decisions that balance values, politics, and money. Weighing heavily in such "trade-off" decisions is the precise nature of federal and state fund allocation rules and procedures.

> Example. There is substantial evidence that Oak Park had more than enough linguistically different students to fall under the state requirement that the district provide a bilingual education program. However, the state legislature only reimburses school districts for a percentage of the excess costs of providing bilingual education (71% in the 1979-80 school year). State enforcement of the bilingual education law has always been especially weak, and there has been no organized community group in Oak Park pressing for bilingual education. According to educators familiar with the situation, Oak Park considered setting up a bilingual program but rejected the idea because of the additional local money that would be required.

> Example. Illinois special education law specifies a set reimbursement ($6,250) for each full-time certified special education staff member, and there is no provision to reimburse for benefits. The reimbursement has not changed for five years, and thus has represented a decreasing percentage of the funds needed to pay any new special education staff who are hired. Thus, school districts who are considering an increase in special education staff take into account the increasing percentage of staff salaries that will have to be paid to new special education staff members through local funds.

Enforcing Requirements

In significant respects, local school districts comply voluntarily with major federal and state requirements, with the availability of extra funds constituting an important incentive to do so.

> Example. State special education requirements set class size and case load limits for teachers who teach children with various handicaps. Documentation of class size and case load must be submitted to the state for special education reimbursement, and our observations indicate that school districts generally comply with these requirements.

However, an important aspect of the local relationship with federal and state governments that has substantial impact on service quality is that enforcement to rectify local deviations from federal and state requirements is sporadic and weak.2/

> Example. Table 4-3 indicates the percentages of white and black students in selected Illinois school districts who are classified as Educable Mentally Handicapped. As noted in Chapter 2, professionals in the field of mental retardation agree that no more than 2% of any student group should be classified as EMH if proper student evaluation procedures are being employed. However, as Table 4-3 indicates, many Illinois school districts have assigned 5% to 12% of their black students to EMH classes. Although these practices have been generally known for a decade, and although the state and federal governments both have clear legal mandates to correct this problem, neither has initiated a systematic enforcement effort to eliminate this misclassification.

The Effects of Federal and State Activities: Moderate Constraints on the Structure of Services

Taken together, the major federal and state activities just reviewed create a set of moderate procedural and monetary constraints on local action. State and federal requirements prompt districts to initiate some level of programming for children that they would not otherwise

Table 4-3. Percentage of Students by Race in Classes for the Educable Mentally Handicapped in Selected Illinois School Districts*

SCHOOL DISTRICT		% OF ANGLO STUDENTS IN EMH	% OF BLACK STUDENTS IN EMH	% OF HISPANIC STUDENTS IN EMH	% OF TOTAL STUDENTS IN EMH
Chicago	K-8	1.42	3.57	1.07	2.68
	9-12	1.30	4.25	1.79	3.17
Rockford	K-8	1.00	2.48	.77	1.30
	9-12	1.15	5.85	2.10	2.01
Elgin	K-8	.60	5.17	1.87	1.02
	9-12	.88	8.78	3.95	1.41
Decatur	K-8	.98	3.24	**	1.63
	9-12	1.26	6.02	**	2.23
Waukegan	K-8	.62	3.39	1.03	1.44
	9-12	1.07	6.93	2.12	2.57
Aurora West	K-8	.90	5.28	1.89	1.60
	9-12	2.41	12.39	8.57	3.99
Rock Island	K-8	.90	2.52	.56	1.31
	9-12	1.45	8.84	1.20	2.99
Cahokia	K-8	1.18	1.34	**	1.22
	9-12	1.90	3.04	**	2.15

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*Source: 1978-79 data submitted to the federal Office for Civil Rights.

**Hispanic students accounted for less than 1% of the total enrollment of these school districts.

provide. One particular aspect of this local response to federal and state requirements is the classification of children at the local level in ways that to some degree comply with the classifications embodied in these requirements. However, the level and nature of the services actually provided are influenced substantially by the level and nature of the federal and state funding, sometimes in ways consistent with legal requirements and sometimes in ways that are at variance with them. Finally, local districts are well aware that federal and state enforcement is almost entirely limited to a process of "paper compliance," except in the rarest instances.3/ As long as programs and services are established that are in keeping with the general intent of the law and specific reporting requirements are adhered to, substantial deviation from the law in local implementation is likely to be tolerated.

Several theoretical perspectives introduced in Chapter 2 help to explain this state of affairs. As the systems management perspective predicts, local behavior is to an appreciable extent consistent with formal mandates. However, adherence to formal mandates is altered by the presence or absence of financial incentives (as the economic incentives perspective suggests) and by the balance of political interests among federal, state, and local levels (as the conflict and bargaining perspective suggests).

School District Activities That Shape the Structure of Services

While activities at the federal and state levels play an important role in establishing selected aspects of the structure of services, planning activities at the school district level constitute another source of impact that is more decisive and comprehensive than the federal and state impact.

During the 1979-80 school year, both Oak Park and Elgin made plans for the 1980-81 school year. Central office staff estimated how much money they would have to spend in 1980-81, what levels of programs and services they would offer, and how much these programs and services would cost. They also made or reaffirmed important decisions about the specific nature of individual services and programs (e.g., about what reading curriculum to use).

These plans, of course, determine whether certain student classifications will exist and what levels of staff and other resources will be committed to them. Shall we set up self-contained classes for children with serious learning disabilities, as parents are asking? How many teachers can we afford to assign to teach these classes? What schools will they be located in?

As will be repeatedly illustrated, such district-level decisions have a decisive effect on the quality of services to children in local schools, although this impact is sometimes ignored by those who analyze education at the school and classroom levels.

This financial and program planning process can best be described by the phrase "incremental planning."4/ In the incremental planning process we documented, programs and services offered during the 1979-80 school year, along with the monies needed to support them, were viewed as "the base." And planners assumed that, by and large, it was desirable to maintain "the base" as much as possible. By beginning with the viewpoint that the base should be maintained, the planners accepted a set of assumptions built up through past experience: assumptions about the types of classifications into which students should be placed, about appropriate funding levels for individual programs to serve students thus classified, about the appropriate use of certain types of revenues, about how programs should be carried out. Beginning with these assumptions about the base, planners then developed 1980-81 plans as adjustments to the base: three new LD resource teachers, the release of ten regular classroom teachers due to declining enrollment, and so on.

As Table 4-1 indicates, there are five key activities that are carried out at the school district level for establishing the structure of services:

A-5. Estimating school district revenues.

A-6. Establishing school district needs and related expenditures.

A-7. Appointing district-level and school-level administrators.

A-8. Planning the mainstream reading program, including staff roles and coordination responsibilities.

A-9. Planning special instructional programs, including staff roles and coordination responsibilities.

Some important points about each of these activities are discussed below. Then we discuss the general features of incremental planning, relating them to several theoretical perspectives introduced in Chapter 2.

Estimating School District Revenues; Establishing School District Needs and Related Expenditures

Through these activities, the district develops an overall budget for the coming school year, with its implications for the types of programs and services to be offered and the numbers of staff assigned to each. In both Elgin and Oak Park, the power to shape these decisions lay mainly with a small group of key administrators, including the superintendent and a few other central office staff members. This group assembled information about revenue sources, the nature and cost of the present programs, and possible modifications of the present program that might be implemented in the coming year. Meshing this information with their own priorities and values, they by and large controlled resource allocation decisions, which were then approved by the respective school boards.5/ This process was characterized by the following features:

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- The present year's services and related expenditures were viewed as "the base," and changes were considered as increments to this base.
- Both districts were having serious difficulties in maintaining the base because of declining enrollment, inflation, and diminishing local tax revenues. The most common response to this problem was to trim most programs and services a little bit.
- During the budget planning period (primarily January to June), the planners had only partial information about important revenue issues, and they were often forced to make key decisions without precise information (e.g., in March, they had to inform some teachers that they would not be rehired because of declining enrollment, but they usually did not find out until June exactly how much general state aid they would have, and general state aid is a major source of funding for teacher salaries).
- Despite the myriad debatable assumptions and uncertain estimates embodied in the resulting planning decisions, the planners' conclusions were presented to the public as inevitabilities, shaped by fiscal constraints that dictated a particular course of action.

Revenue estimation is one important thread in this planning process. In Oak Park and Elgin, revenue sources consisted of local tax revenues, general state aid, categorical state aid, and categorical federal aid. From a legal standpoint, the districts had wide latitude in spending the majority of this money, because local tax revenue and general state aid arrived with few strings attached. In Oak Park, for instance, 75% of revenues came from these non-categorical sources. In practice, the planners viewed themselves as having almost no flexibility in planning for the coming year, because it was assumed that the present program would be maintained and that sources of funds currently supporting particular services to children would continue to support these services. For example, if art and music instruction or janitorial services were supported through unrestricted funds and the bilingual program was supported primarily through categorical state funds, the possibility of reducing art, music, or janitorial services and putting the savings into increased bilingual programs would, customarily, not be entertained. Rather, it would be assumed that any increase in bilingual programs would have to come from state or federal sources that had been previously funding the program.

> Example. Elgin administrators were concerned about the problems of those Hispanic students who, because they had a minimal command of English, were not placed in the bilingual program, but who steadily fell further behind in the mainstream reading program. They prepared a federal grant proposal targeted on these student needs; however, when the proposal was not funded, no local funds were allocated for this program.

If those involved in the budgeting process are convinced that customary assumptions about how to spend money are in fact rigid constraints on planning, making small adjustments in each program budget becomes the most credible solution to gradually shrinking funds, even though this approach often fails to match resources with the most pressing student needs for services.

In a variety of conscious and unconscious ways, revenue estimation is presented to support the view that certain courses of action are inevitable.

> Example. In Oak Park a preliminary budget was presented in March. It was a "worst case" budget in terms of revenue estimation, although it was not presented as such. The preliminary budget assumed no reduction in teaching staff due to declining enrollment, no teacher retirements, and only the level of state revenues that had been available in the previous year. No alternative budgets, based on more optimistic assumptions, were presented. The preliminary budget showed a gap between estimated revenues and the revenues needed to maintain the present program. The effect of releasing this preliminary budget was to focus attention on what adjustments could be made to maintain the present program as much as possible -- rather than to generate discussions about substantial changes in budgetary (and program) priorities.

At the same time that school district administrators are attempting to estimate revenues, they are also determining what services the school district will provide during the next year and how much these services will cost. The most striking feature of this process is the limited extent to which it builds on a comprehensive analysis of student needs, the characteristics of students currently receiving programs and services, and the effectiveness of these current programs and services. Much of this information is not collected at all. Other information is collected by a particular administrator for a specific purpose (to comply with a state reporting requirement, to prepare a federal grant request), but the information never reaches key planners. In response to our request for data on the racial composition of special education classes, for instance, one administrator said jokingly, "Be sure to put it in your report that we don't have this information."

Example. Educators in both Elgin and Oak Park acknowledged that there were a substantial number of students with mild to moderate handicaps who were not currently being served. As one administrator admitted, "If we identified all the kids who need services, we would be flooded." However, no data was collected about the extent of this problem. Rather it was assumed for planning purposes that the number of children presently served, plus those officially awaiting placement, equaled the number who needed special education services.

Example. In Elgin, there was no standardized system for testing all children in reading achievement annually to provide an information base for program planning, program evaluation, and student placement. In Oak Park, such annual testing was carried out; however, breakdowns of achievement data on such dimensions as race and participation in various special programs were not made, and breakdowns by school, while they were completed, were not made public.

Instead of bringing together information that would allow a comprehensive analysis of student needs, the characteristics of students receiving particular services, and the effectiveness of these services, the planners tend to assume that the levels of staffing being maintained in the current year are good proxies for the nature of student needs. Thus, an appropriate response to student needs is seen, by and large, as the effort to maintain the present program. Further, if central office planners feel that the commitment to addressing a particular student need should be increased, planners tend to assume that additional resources will be needed to solve the problem and to equate stepped-up commitment with increasing the size of the present program intended to meet this student need (for example, the need to help students who are behind in reading is met by increasing the number of remedial reading teachers, rather than by rethinking the nature of the reading program comprehensively).

In many instances, incremental planning creates and perpetuates severe deficiencies in service quality. The effort to address unmet needs is constrained by the assumption that the present configuration of services and the present use of various funding sources should be maintained, so that major new initiatives to address unmet needs are rare. When programs to meet special needs do exist, there is a danger that the number of student "slots" available in these programs will be inadequate, because the number of slots available this year has a decisive impact on the number available next year, independent of the level of student need.

Planning the Mainstream Reading Program

The overall planning process described above entails several important decisions that shape the mainstream reading program. By deciding what the student-teacher ratio will be for the next year, how many mainstream classroom teachers will be hired, and how these teachers will be allocated to schools, the district's planners establish the numbers and school assignments of mainstream teachers who will teach reading.

Other decisions made at the school district level affect how these classroom teachers, put in place by the budget planning process, will actually teach children. To understand the nature of this influence, it is important to recall the central office organization charts presented in Chapter 3. In both Elgin and Oak Park, the reading coordinator was low in the central office hierarchy; this coordinator had no formal authority to direct the activities of any other central office staff member, nor the authority to supervise any school-level personnel. Formal directives about the nature of the mainstream reading program that would have the force of policy had to come from the school board, the superintendent, or another key line administrator. For those possessing the formal authority to issue such directives and to enforce them, reading was, in practice, one of a large number of competing concerns. Thus, formal directives about the nature of the mainstream reading program and enforcement of these directives were made only intermittently. Typical decisions of this type included the following:

- The adoption of a basal reading series and of supplementary materials for teaching reading (in both Elgin and Oak Park).
- Specification of the number of minutes each day that were to be devoted to reading (in Oak Park).
- Specification of the nature of district-wide achievement testing that would be carried out in reading (in both Elgin and Oak Park).

In both school districts, the trend over the past decade had been to tighten up the classroom teacher's discretion in teaching reading by requiring the predominant use of one basal reading series. However, the amount of leeway that in fact remained at the school and classroom level in determining exactly how mainstream reading instruction would be organized and how children would be taught was substantial, as will be noted below.

The reading coordinator, who was the only central office administrator worrying about the structure of mainstream reading services on a regular basis, was thus left to exert whatever influence he/she could by convincing central office line administrators that particular facets of the reading instruction program merited increased central office coordination or specific monitoring by those with line authority. In addition, the reading coordinator also attempted to influence school-level staff, including principals and classroom teachers, by developing curriculum guides, by visiting schools, and by conducting various staff development experiences for teachers. The effect of this intervention in the local schools was affected significantly by the extent to which the reading coordinator was viewed as having the strong support of those with line authority, as opposed to acting on his/her own initiative.

Planning Special Instructional Programs

As indicated earlier, there were five special

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instructional programs that are an important part of reading instruction services: Title I, special education, bilingual education, English-as-a-Second-Language, and remedial reading.

As is the case with mainstream reading instruction, overall district-level budget planning establishes the number of special teachers who are part of of each of these programs, although the program coordinators have a significant role in deciding what schools these teachers will be placed in.

To a substantial extent, the coordinator of each special program makes staff allocation and program content decisions separately, and coordinated planning does not take place to assess the overall configuration of special services available at particular schools. Some have attributed this fragmentation largely to the advent of federal and state categorical programs, and our data provide examples of the pressure that federal and state requirements create toward increased fragmentation. However, our data also suggest that the growth of these categorical programs is by no means the root cause of fragmentation. Research concerning the patterns of organization in schools that draws on data predating state and federal programs indicates that fragmentation and compartmentalization have long been basic characteristics of the educational service delivery system.6/ At the district level, for example, Elgin employed 25 subject area specialists who answered to the associate superintendent for curriculum. Patterns of fragmentation and limited communication among these specialists were already there at the time the federal and state programs were introduced; the state and federal programs did not create this structure.

Further increasing the tendency toward fragmentation was the fact that such programs as transitional bilingual education and learning disabilities resource rooms were viewed by a number of school principals and central office staff in these school districts as illegitimate. One key administrator stated, for instance, that "there really is no such thing as a learning disability." In contrast, then, to mathematics or foreign language coordinators, the coordinators of special education and bilingual education faced indifference and sometimes hostility. In these circumstances, the tendency to pull in for self-protection was increased.

In contrast to the reading coordinators, the majority of the special program coordinators had line authority to supervise the activities of their respective special education, bilingual education, and Title I teachers, although in a few cases these special teachers were formally responsible to the building principal (e.g., the Title I teachers in Oak Park). Some special program coordinators exercised their formal authority vigorously; they defined a very specific program for student assessment or classroom instruction, and they pressed teachers to implement it. Others did not use the formal authority consistently, so that the school-level special teachers operated with a high level of discretion.

Overall, then, the patterns of central office monitoring and coordination for special programs observed at the school district level created highly variable central office influence on the behavior of special program staff at the school level in specifying assessment methods, curricula, and teaching methods. Also apparent was a noticeable lack of coordination between individual special programs and between the special programs and the mainstream reading program, even though all of these programs had reading instruction as a high priority and the teachers who were part of these programs were frequently dealing with the same students. In part, this lack of planning occurred because special program administrators did not view their programs as reading instruction programs, although reading instruction was in fact central to program activities.

This fragmentation enhances the tendency toward incremental planning. If there are no effective procedures for joint planning among the various coordinators, the tendency to plan by making small additions and subtractions from each separate program, building from the present base, is reinforced.

Theoretical Perspectives Concerning the District-Level Planning Process

The key characteristics of the district-level planning process just described (e.g., fragmentation, planning as adjustment to the base) fit well with what we would expect based on the theoretical perspectives introduced in Chapter 2.

The *economic incentives perspective* calls attention to the ways that both monetary and non-monetary incentives influence planning decisions.7/ Planners described "trade-offs" that they calculated in deciding on levels of service; the economic incentives perspective calls attention to this obvious feature of the educational process that is often not considered in educational research: the major role that money plays in shaping services to children.

The economic incentives perspective helps explain why last year's program becomes the base for future planning. Since fund availability is an important constraint on what services can be offered, the funding levels for the present year constitute a good starting point for planning a workable budget for next year. The economic incentives perspective also suggests that important departures from the present base will take place when there are major increases or decreases in the availability of funds, especially funds earmarked for a particular purpose (such as special education).

The *organizational patterns perspective* highlights three characteristics of organizational behavior that help us understand why incremental planning predominates: fragmentation, discretion within limits, and routine.

The organizational patterns perspective calls attention to the consistent tendency of complex organizations to fragment large responsibilities (such as the education of children) into small parts and for these parts to be divided up among organizational units and individuals.8/ Such units and individuals are given (or develop in practice) substantial autonomy in carrying out their work day-to-day, as has occurred in the district-level planning processes in Oak Park and Elgin.

Supervisors who are in theory monitoring the work of their subordinates in fact allow broad discretion concerning the ways in which subordinates carry out their jobs.9/ As long as subordinates stay within certain broad limits (e.g., by showing up on time, filing required reports, avoiding major scandals), supervisors continue to allow discretion. The relationship between supervisor and subordinate is, in fact, a bargain, a live-and-let-live agreement, in which each agrees to let the other alone if certain basic ground rules are adhered to. Thus, the complex collaboration that would be necessary for a school district to make comprehensive changes in the way it provides special instructional programs, for instance, seldom takes place.

The organizational patterns perspective further suggests that units and individuals operating within this fragmented structure develop routines through which they carry out their day-to-day work, and that these routines may deviate substantially from formal requirements for carrying out the job.10/ For example, special education supervisors who have historically directed separate special education programs may undercut school district plans for mainstreaming children that require collaboration with mainstream teachers and administrators.

Customary methods for carrying out one's responsibilities take on potent psychological reality and are viewed as the only "realistic" way to get the job done. Thus, plans for the future build on present routines, and planners find it difficult to imagine alternative ways of carrying out various obligations (e.g., evaluating children for EMH classes or spending revenues from local taxes).

The organizational patterns perspective suggests one reason why planning that assumes the present program as "the base" is so attractive; such a planning strategy assumes that most organizational routines will remain undisturbed, avoiding disruptions in routines that might stir up dissatisfaction and resistance.

The conflict and bargaining perspective also suggests why district level planning is fragmented and incremental. From the conflict and bargaining perspective, the planning process represents a major arena in which individuals and the interests they represent bargain over scarce resources. Fragmentation is to be expected, as units within the organization fight to protect the resources they've got and to get more.

The conflict and bargaining perspective also suggests a reason that planning from the base is an attractive approach. The program and related budget that is in place during the current year is the result of the bargaining process from the previous year. An excellent initial estimate of a resource allocation plan that will satisfy the various interests for the coming year is thus this year's budget.

The conflict and bargaining perspective also suggests that one can expect substantial shifts in the program and budget levels when there is a major shift in the strength of members of the bargaining coalition actively contesting resource allocation decisions.

> Example. In Oak Park, a persistent group of parents pressed for the district to establish separate classes for children with severe learning disabilities, classes that had not previously existed. The district agreed, motivated in part by the concern that the parents might initiate a complaint based on PL 94-142 and in part by the fact that newly available federal money under that law could be used for this purpose.

The subculture perspective suggests that we might discover a frame of reference, a way of looking at the world, that makes the prevailing appproach to planning seem plausible to those who carry it out; we did indeed discover such a frame of reference, which we characterize as "pragmatism" or "making do." The central belief on which this perspective is based is that educators are doing the best they can to meet the needs of children, given the financial, organizational, and political constraints within which "realistically" they must function.11/ These constraints are consciously or unconsciously accepted, and it becomes the educator's job to "make do" within these constraints.

> Example. One Oak Park administrator was asked if there were waiting lists for students to receive learning disability resource services. She responded that the district didn't have any such waiting lists because it would be illegal to do so. Upon further questioning she explained that there are children in some schools that need these services but that because particular schools don't have room for them in LD placements, the schools "find another place for them; we take care of them some way."

The "making do" mindset was prevalent in both school districts at all levels. It is the belief that allows teachers, administrators, and other professional staff to proceed with their daily work, knowing that ideally they could do a better job, but believing that they are doing the best they can under constraints of limited resources, limited time, limited compensation, and so on. Central to the "making do" concept is the notion that since there are not enough resources available so that educators can assist all students, some must, regrettably, be shortchanged or sacrificed: "What do you mean we should be bringing truants back to school, we have enough trouble dealing with just the ones that show up." "Of course, we know there are more kids behind in reading than we can serve through Title I, but we just don't have the federal funds to help them." This sense of triage not only pervades the planning process at the district level, but also planning and implementation at the school level, as we will explain later.

The systems management perspective, while its explanations must be discounted and modified by evidence from the other perspectives discussed above, is still an important explanation of organizational behavior in the budget planning process. Those with formal authority, while they often accede to the forces working toward fragmentation and dispersion of power, can still control and redirect the activities of their subordinates when they are willing to devote aggressive sustained effort to making sure that subordinates comply with their directives.12/

> Example. In Champaign, Illinois, the superintendent, encouraged by outside consultants, became extremely concerned about the high level of black student enrollment in classes for the mentally retarded.13/ He instituted a program to change classification practices, to reevaluate all present EMH students, and to provide supportive services in returning them to the mainstream program. Along the way, he developed strong political support for this effort from organized groups within the black community. He also encountered strong resistance, especially from EMH teachers, and endured the loss of substantial special education funds in sending children back to mainstream classes.

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Incremental Planning at the District Level Creates Deficient Services for Children

The district planning process is thoroughly "understandable," once we appreciate typical organizational behavior. However, these understandable prevailing practices create and perpetuate serious deficiencies in the services provided to children, such as wide variations in services available at particular schools that bear an unclear relationship to variations in student needs.

> *Example*. In both Elgin and Oak Park, the percentage of students served through learning disabilities resource programs varies widely from school to school. The percentage in individual Elgin schools varies between 1.5% and 7.1%, while the percentage in individual Oak Park schools varies from 4.1% to 8.2%. Chi-square tests of the statistical significance of these school to school variations exceed the .001 level, indicating that these are not merely random fluctuations. In Elgin, we were told that these variations reflected the fact that low-income children had more LD problems, but an analysis of the relationship between percent of low-income students and percent of LD students in individual schools indicated that low-income schools did not have more LD resource students.

In addition to such variations in service availability, other types of service deficiencies are created or maintained by incremental planning at the district level. Misclassification and misplacement of students result when educators attempt to "make do" by assigning students with problems to special programs that happen to be available in a particular school. Inconsistent central office supervision leads to wide discrepancies in the way a particular service is provided from school to school that are outside the boundaries of appropriate practice. Service providers who serve the same children fail to coordinate their work.

The link between district level planning and the development of such problems for children is spelled out further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Appointing District-Level and School-Level Administrators

In addition to the implementation of the district-level planning process, another activity carried out at the district level that is crucial in establishing the structure of services is the selection of district-level and school-level administrators. It is difficult to remove school and school district administrators once they are placed in particular administrative positions. However, most school districts have substantial flexibility in the initial selection process for these positions.

Contributing to fragmented planning at the district level is the fact that district-level administrators are not usually selected with a focus on their potential contribution to creating a coherent reading instruction program. Neither job descriptions nor selection criteria emphasize this issue, except for those staff formally responsible for the mainstream reading program.

Similarly, competence in reading instruction and student classification issues is not consistently emphasized in the selection of school principals. The fact that a substantial number of principals lack an extensive background in working on such instructional issues contributes to the wide variations that we observed in the principal's role in instructional leadership, as discussed below.

Planning at the School and Classroom Levels

There are two key activities (see Table 4-1) that are carried out at the school and classroom levels for establishing the structure of services:

A-10. Planning the mainstream reading program, including staff roles and coordination responsibilities.

A-11. Planning special instructional programs, including staff roles and coordination responsibilities.

The resource allocation decisions made at the school district level provide the individual elementary schools with specified numbers of regular classroom teachers and specialists (special education teachers, bilingual teachers, reading specialists, counselors, psychologists, assistant principals, and so on). Yet, as we have discussed and illustrated in Chapter 2, schools provided with the same level of staff resources and serving similar student bodies often differ substantially in the nature and quality of services provided to children.

Like other researchers, we found wide school-level variations in services, and many of these variations had

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their roots in differing planning decisions made at the school level. Despite directives from the central office about such matters as the adopted basal reader, the curriculum for the bilingual program, and appropriate procedures for assessing children with learning disabilities, local school staff make numerous planning decisions about the specifics of the structure of services with widely differing results. They decide, for example, issues like the following in ways that result in substantial variations in services:

- The extent of regrouping and other collaboration within the mainstream program. In some schools, there is widespread teaming, while in others there is almost no cooperation or collaboration among teachers.
- Specific duties of building-level special teachers and responsibilities for collaboration among them. In some schools, special staff constitute a working team that plans jointly and meets regularly to consider options for serving children with special needs. In other schools, special staff function almost exclusively as individuals, collaborating little with other special staff or with mainstream teachers.
- Which aspects of special education referral and classification procedures will be adhered to. In some schools, referral and assessment approximates the procedures embodied in federal and state law. In others, these procedures are viewed as paperwork and deviations from formal procedure (discussed in Chapter 5) customarily occur.
- Whether and how diagnostic tests will be used in placing children within the mainstream reading program. In some schools, teachers make extensive use of testing information. In others, they rely primarily on the teacher's recommendation from the previous year in making this placement.

Like other investigators, we found that the school principal's role is decisive in shaping the school-level planning process concerning such issues. Most striking in our data was a wide variation in the extent to which principals took an active role in shaping such decisions about student classification and instruction. At one end of a continuum, some principals took a highly active role in making such decisions, and, in general, were trying to bring some school-wide coherence to the structure of services (an active approach). At the other end of the continuum were several principals who almost totally refrained from involvement in these issues, leaving them for others to decide (a laissez-faire approach).

> Example. Two school principals in Oak Park reflect the extremes of the active and the laissez-faire style. The laissez-faire principal gave "my teachers their head because I respect their professional judgment." He didn't feel it was part of his role to plan or oversee the specifics of educational programming (reading instruction, etc.), and he was not aware of how teachers in fact carried out many instructional activities (e.g., of how many teachers collaborated to regroup students). He did not visit classrooms. When a teacher was incompetent but had tenure, he tended to "work around" the teacher -- for instance, by not assigning him any "problem students."
>
> The active principal, in contrast, was determined to shape those decisions that the laissez-faire principal left to others. She took a central role in planning the instructional program, developing procedures for diagnosing student needs, coordinating the special education referral process, etc. She visited classrooms to monitor and assist teachers. She demanded that the school district remove a tenured teacher she felt was incompetent.
>
> Half the principals we interviewed in Elgin and Oak

Park took a predominantly laissez-faire approach to key decisions about the structure of services. And consistent with the subculture perspective, they had a frame of reference that justified this leadership style. They believed, for instance, that school district policy and curricula defined appropriate practices; that central office administrators had primary responsibility for educational planning; that individual staff members at the building level had been prepared by training and experience to deal with curricular issues and that their professional judgment should be respected; and that it was really not feasible to change staff behavior given the constraints imposed by the system (e.g., teacher tenure).

Both the active and laissez-faire principals have a coherent rationale for their leadership styles. However, viewed from the standpoint of service quality, the laissez-faire leadership style enables some school-level staff to employ detrimental practices for student classification, provision of instruction, and service coordination (documented in Chapters 5 and 6). Tendencies toward service fragmentation, which exist in all complex organizations, are extreme in the school, where teachers view their classrooms as their own turf and resist collaboration with their colleagues.14/ The laissez-faire leader reinforces this fragmentation to the detriment of the students.

Contrasting with the principal who takes a laissez-faire approach to planning the structure of services are highly active principals, whom we also identified in both Oak Park and Elgin. Their successful initiative illustrates the fact that coherent service planning is possible at the school level. Other research concerning the authority structure of school also indicates the viability of the active leadership role; teachers prefer to be left alone by the principal, but they also acknowledge the principal's formal authority to direct their activities, and they will comply with specific persistent leadership when it is provided.15/

If leadership in establishing the structure of services doesn't come from the principal, the likelihood that it can come from other school staff members is very low. In some instances, specialists can develop plans that are acted on by other staff members without the principal's active support: for example, a reading specialist can get some fraction of the mainstream teachers to cooperate in regrouping students. However, such plans are typically very fragile and depend on a particular mix of personalities.

The ability of the classroom teacher to play a leadership role in developing a structure of services of consistently high quality is even less than that of the specialist. In the school where the principal discourages cooperation between mainstream and bilingual teachers, for instance, it would be virtually impossible for a mainstream teacher to buck the school's norms and work collaboratively with a bilingual teacher with whom he/she shared some children.

Interlocking Influences on Services to Children

The research has illuminated some major features of the actions at the federal, state, school district, school, and classroom levels that establish the structure of services to children. Actions at the federal and state levels have only moderate impacts in establishing the structure of services that children confront on the first day of school, yet this federal and state impact is often the only one that prods the district to undertake organized efforts to meet special needs that keep children from learning to read. Actions at the school district level have a decisive impact on whether certain types of services exist at all and on the level of service provided -- number of students served, number of mainstream and special teachers in particular schools. Like the federal and state levels, the school district level exerts moderate influence on the specific nature and quality of services to children, beyond questions of "how many," but there is much discretion left for actors at the school and classroom levels. At these levels where services are actually provided to students, major variations in the nature and quality of services result substantially from the leadership style of the principal on educational issues -- a style that can range from active to laissez-faire.

The present research underscores the importance, for those working to improve the way services are provided to children, of understanding how multiple levels of the system shape these services, rather than focusing on a single level.

Notes

1/Elgin's lack of adequate programs for students whose academic progress is hindered by inadequate mastery of English reflects a national problem cited in Chapter 2; nationally only 44% of students with such problems are receiving any form of bilingual or ESL services.

2/For documentation of the sporadic and weak nature of federal and state enforcement efforts concerning a variety of educational equity issues, see, for example, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, The Federal Civil Rights Enforcement Effort -- 1974; Final Report to the Secretary of the Task Force on Equal Educational Opportunity for Handicapped Children, by Betsy Levin, Chair (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1980); U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, National Institute of Education, Administration of Compensatory Education, Sept. 19, 1977; Adams v. Matthews, No. 3095-70 (D.D.C.); Project on Equal Education Rights, NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, Stalled at the Start: Government Action on Sex Bias in the Schools (Washington, D.C.: Author, 1977).

3/Based on data about a wide range of government enforcement efforts, Edelman has argued that enforcement activities are typically symbolic rituals that serve to assure the public that the government is enforcing the law carried out by agencies that are tightly constrained in their enforcement efforts by the political power of those they are supposed to regulate. See Murray Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois, 1964).

4/This term is derived from Wildavsky's classic study of the federal budget process: Aaron Wildavsky, The Politics of the Budgetary Process, 3rd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979).

5/The domination of school district decision making by the system's professional leadership, with the school board playing a secondary role, has been carefully and repeatedly documented. See H. Ziegler and M. K. Jennings, Governing American Schools (Belmont, Ca.: Duxbury Press, 1974); and Michael W. Kirst, "What Happens at the Local Level after School Finance Reform?" Policy Analysis 3 (summer 1977): 301-324.

6/Willard Waller, The Sociology of Teaching (New York: John Wiley, 1965); Dan C. Lortie, Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1975), pp. 162-186; Seymour B. Sarason et al., "Teaching Is a Lonely Profession," in Psychology in Community Settings, ed.

Seymour B. Sarason (New York: John Wiley, 1966), pp. 74-97.

7/John Pincus, "Incentives for Innovation in the Public Schools," Review of Educational Research 44 (1974): 113-144.

8/Graham T. Allison, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), p. 80.

9/See, for example, Karl E. Weick, "Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems," Administrative Science Quarterly 21 (March 1976): 1-18; Richard A. Weatherley, Reforming Special Education: Policy Implementation from State Level to Street Level (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979); Lortie; John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan, "Notes on the Structure of Educational Organization: Revised Version," paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association, August 1975.

10/See, for example, Seymour B. Sarason, The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971), pp. 62-87; Weatherley, pp. 73-91.

11/Lieberman and Miller, summarizing numerous sociological and anthropological studies of teaching, note this pragmatic orientation among teachers, which they characterize as the teacher's tendency to "be practical" and to "make do." Ann Lieberman and Lynne Miller, "The Social Realities of Teaching," Teachers College Record 80 (September 1978). For another description of this mindset, which emphasizes its negative consequences for children, see Raymond C. Rist, The Urban School: A Factory for Failure (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1973).

12/The potential power to control the behavior of subordinates possessed by those who hold formal authority in the administrative structure has been documented by Howard Becker, "The Teacher in the Authority System of the Public School," Journal of Educational Sociology 27 (November 1953); Lortie, p. 199; and more recently by case studies of instructionally effective schools. See Phi Delta Kappa, Why Do Some Urban School Succeed? The Phi Delta Kappa Study of Exceptional Urban Elementary Schools (Bloomington, Ind.: Author, 1980).

13/"Illinois Puts an End to 'Six-Hour Retardates,'" Education Daily, 6 May 1981, p. 3.

14/See Lieberman and Miller, p. 60.

15/Howard Becker, "The Teacher in the Authority System of the Public School," Journal of Educational Sociology 27 (November 1953); Lortie, pp. 196-200; Phi Delta Kappa.

CHAPTER 5. ACTIVITY CLUSTER B. ASSESSING AND PLACING CHILDREN

After the structure of services for children is established, complete with a set of classifications or "slots" for children, the school district must then place individual children in these slots. In practice, setting up the structure and assessing and placing children are closely related; but there is an important distinguishable cluster of activities through which children are actually assessed and placed, and this chapter focuses separate attention on this cluster.

Most of the decision making through which student assessment and placement are carried out occurs at the school and classroom level, with the district playing an important but generally secondary role, and the federal and state levels playing an even more peripheral role. Nevertheless, each level exerts some influence on the assessment and placement process, so we discuss the nature of activities at each level that are part of the cluster. The complete list of activities in Cluster B, along with examples of related sub-activities, is presented in Table 5-1.

Federal and State Levels

There are two important federal and state activities

Table 5-1. Key Activities and Examples of Sub-Activities in Activity Cluster B: Assessing and Placing Students

FEDERAL AND STATE LEVELS

B-1. Establishing federal and state requirements concerning the process of classification. Includes such sub-activities as:

- B-1.1 Specifying through law and regulation the characteristics of children who can or must be served in various special programs.
- B-1.2 Specifying through law and regulation characteristics of the process of appropriate student classification.

B-2. Enforcing federal and state requirements concerning the process of classification. Includes such sub-activities as:

- B-2.1 Collecting data about the number and characteristics of students in various special programs.
- B-2.2 Hearing and deciding appeals of local classification decisions.

SCHOOL DISTRICT LEVEL

B-3. Establishing and implementing policies for assigning students to schools, grades, and homerooms. Includes such sub-activities as:

- B-3.1 Determining school attendance boundaries.
- B-3.2 Specifying requirements for the formation of homerooms.

B-4. Establishing and implementing policies for assessing and placing students within the mainstream reading program. Includes such sub-activities as:

- B-4.1 Establishing a reading achievement testing program.
- B-4.2 Establishing criteria for placement in levels of the mainstream reading program.
- B-4.3 Monitoring placement in levels of the mainstream reading program.

B-5. Establishing and implementing policies for referring, assessing, and placing students in special instructional programs. Includes such sub-activities as:

- B-5.1 Specifying appropriate test instruments and cutoff scores for special program placement.
- B-5.2 Monitoring the use of test instruments in special program placement.

(Table 5-1 continued)

SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM LEVELS

B-6. Assigning students to grades and classrooms.

B-7. Assessing and placing students in the mainstream reading program. Includes such sub-activities as:

- B-7.1 Monitoring the collection and use of student test data.
- B-7.2 Monitoring placement decisions made by individual teachers.
- B-7.3 Monitoring the degree of reassessment within the mainstream program.

B-8. Referring students for special program assessment. Includes such sub-activities as:

- B-8.1 Informally diagnosing perceived student problems.
- B-8.2 Initiating a formal request for student assessment.
- B-8.3 Reviewing the classroom teacher's referral to decide on next steps.

B-9. Assessing and placing students in special instructional programs. Includes such sub-activities as:

- B-9.1 Selecting test instruments and procedures to be used in assessing specific children.
- B-9.2 Making a placement recommendation.
- B-9.3 Placing the child in a special program.

that shape the process of assessing and placing children:

B-1. Establishing federal and state requirements concerning the process of classification.

B-2. Enforcing federal and state requirements concerning the process of classification.

Variations in Federal and State Requirements: A Political Issue

In general, detailed criteria for the process of classification are not spelled out at the state and federal levels.

The federal government and Illinois state government do not specify testing procedures, score cutoffs, or decision-making procedures for any aspect of assessment and placement in the mainstream reading program. Any such effort on the part of the federal and state governments would undoubtedly be strongly opposed as an infringement on local control.

As noted in Chapter 3, the state of Illinois specifies five categories of English-language proficiency for transitional bilingual programs and requires school districts to provide transitional bilingual education for children in three of the five categories. However, local school districts have vigorously opposed state efforts to specify the tests and procedures that are to be used in making these judgments, so these decisions about the specifics of the classification process are left to the local districts. A state-commissioned evaluation of the bilingual program documented major differences between school districts in the students being served as a result of this variability in student assessment.1/

In Title I programs, the federal government has specified the rules for identifying target schools, has indicated that educationally disadvantaged children must be served in these schools and has suggested that educationally disadvantaged children be identified based on their difficulty in learning to read. However, local school districts and schools use their own assessment process in deciding who is educationally disadvantaged and which educationally disadvantaged children within a particular school will be served through a Title I program. (As this report is being completed, the Congress has just amended Title I to eliminate virtually all of these federal requirements.)

Only in the education of the handicapped have federal and state agencies specified detailed requirements for the process of student assessment and placement. Compared with their lack of specificity in stipulating how to identify a linguistically different or educationally deprived child, the state and federal governments offer much more detailed criteria for identifying a handicapped child. State and federal laws stipulate the need for a multidisciplinary evaluation which draws on several sources of information about the child's strengths and weaknesses. Further, a team of educators must meet to assess this information, reach a diagnosis, and define an appropriate placement. The child's parents have the right to participate in this decision-making process and must approve the initial diagnosis and placement. Placement must be made in the "least restrictive environment," and evaluation and placement must be non-discriminatory. Parents have a right to appeal what they deem an inappropriate assessment or placement through an appeal system established by the state. Initial studies of the implementation of this system indicate some substantial movement on the local level toward compliance with these procedures, although actual practice deviates from legal intent in many significant ways, as we will illustrate below.2/

State and federal requirements differ, then, from one program to another in the extent to which they mandate specific criteria and procedures for student assessment and placement. These variations have little to do with differences among the children served by the various programs. Rather, as the political conflict and bargaining perspective suggests, these variations result largely from the relative political strength of the advocates of state and federal intervention who have been concerned about a particular problem; special education requirements are most specific largely because special education consumer groups are more potent politically than advocates of bilingual and compensatory education.3/

One important way that state and federal requirements for assessment and placement differ is whether assessment carries an obligation to provide a child with a special placement and with services. Title I requires the identification of educationally disadvantaged children in the target schools, but the district can then decide which of these educationally disadvantaged children will be served through Title I programs. However, in the case of bilingual education and special education, when the district assesses a child as being linguistically different or as having a handicap, the district is under a legal obligation to provide special services.

Local school districts have vigorously opposed federal and state efforts to limit their discretion in assessing and classifying students. They charge that such requirements infringe on local control. They are particularly strong in resisting assessment requirements that carry with them the mandate to serve all students with particular special needs, unless federal and state governments provide full funding for the extra costs of providing this service. As we shall see below, the ability of local school districts to exercise considerable discretion in determining exactly which students merit particular classifications is crucial to them in controlling educational costs and staffing patterns.

Weak Enforcement

In the face of local resistance to regulation of the assessment and placement process, federal and state enforcement practices have generally been weak. This has been the case even in those areas where the federal and state governments have established fairly specific requirements for assessing and placing students. We cited earlier the abundant documentation of this point, offering as an example the lack of federal and state action to remedy the disproportionate placement of black children in classes for the mentally retarded, despite clear federal and state legal obligations to insure non-discriminatory testing and despite substantial evidence of local deviation from non-discriminatory assessment practices.

School District, School, and Classroom Levels

It is useful to discuss the activities for assessing and placing students that are carried out at the school district, school, and classroom levels in two groups. First, we discuss assessment and placement in the mainstream reading program, looking at activities carried out at the school district, school, and classroom levels. Second, we discuss assessment and placement for special programs, again discussing the school district, school, and classroom levels together.

Assessing and Placing Students in the Mainstream Reading Program

The following activities are entailed in assessing and placing students in the mainstream reading program at the school district, school, and classroom levels:

B-3. Establishing and implementing policies for assigning students to schools, grades, and homerooms (school district level).

B-4. Establishing and implementing policies for assessing and placing students within the mainstream reading program (school district level).

B-6. Assigning students to grades and classrooms (school and classroom levels).

B-7. Assessing and placing students in the mainstream reading program (school and classroom levels).

The way these activities are carried out has already been described in Chapter 3. In Table 5-2, we briefly summarize the highlights of this process.

In reviewing the dynamics of this set of activities, four themes stand out, each relating to the discretion that individuals at various levels characteristically exercise in making classification decisions: patterns of district control, information used in making placement decisions, monitoring of placement decisions, and degree of reassessment and regrouping. Each is discussed below.

Patterns of District-Level Control. Some decisions that affect placement within the mainstream reading program are

Table 5-2. Assessing and Placing Students in the Mainstream Reading Program

- Students were assigned to "neighborhood" schools primarily based on residence location. Exceptions were assignments to attend special programs, to promote racial integration, and as a result of special parent request. This process was controlled at the district level.

- Students were assigned to a grade strictly according to birth date (with a few exceptions). This policy was set at the district level.

- Students were assigned to a homeroom at their grade level. If they attended a self-contained special education program, their special education teacher was their homeroom teacher. Otherwise, they were assigned to a mainstream homeroom teacher. The school district specified that mainstream homerooms be heterogeneous in terms of reading ability; the district also specified which teachers were available to head homerooms and specified the maximum and minimum class size. Within these constraints, principals assigned particular students to homerooms, sometimes with the involvement of teachers.

- Some homeroom teachers taught their homeroom students strictly on their own; others collaborated either minimally or extensively with other homeroom teachers. Thus, when students were assigned to a homeroom, they were also assigned to an instructional setting where teacher collaboration ranged from none to minor to extensive.

- Students assigned to homerooms were placed at instructional levels within the district's adopted reading program. The basis on which this placement decision was made varied by school district, school, and classroom and could include some combination of reading achievement test scores, recommendation from previous teacher, data in the child's cumulative record file, and observations made by present teacher.

- Unless a student's homeroom teacher cooperated with other teachers in providing mainstream reading instruction, he/she was responsible for providing mainstream instruction to students within the homeroom who were placed at various reading levels. Often students at a given level were divided into two or more reading groups, with students in each group working on the same material at the same time.

- If a student's homeroom teacher cooperated with other teachers in providing mainstream reading instruction, students might be regrouped in some way among the cooperating teachers, usually to limit the number of levels any one teacher had to deal with. Teachers then created reading groups within levels to facilitate instruction.

tightly controlled at the district level, while others are controlled only moderately or not at all. In general, tight district control is reserved for those decisions that determine how many slots will be available within the mainstream program and in which schools these slots will be available. Thus, the districts exercise tight control over assignment to school, numbers of teachers available at a school, and allowable student-teacher ratios. From an economic incentives perspective, central office administrators have a strong economic incentive to control these decisions, since mistakes in this area are quite likely to bring strong negative sanctions from the school board or the various interest groups concerned about school district policy. For example, one school superintendent in an eastern city failed to inform enough teachers that they would not be rehired in the next school year because of declining enrollment; thus, despite a major financial crisis, the school board was obligated to retain several hundred teachers it did not need.

In contrast, decisions about which students will fill the available slots in the mainstream program are left primarily for school-level staff, although district-level staff do exert some direction over these decisions. For instance, both districts we studied adopted one basal reading series that is based on "levels" and includes skill tests for student placement. By adopting this instructional system the districts created important parts of the classification structure for mainstream reading and provided teachers with a means for placing students within this structure.

Further, both districts required the collection of some reading achievement data that would be potentially useful in placement. Elgin tested children in kindergarten, third, and sixth grade for reading achievement and allowed individual schools to test students annually at their option. Oak Park mandated a more systematic testing program. Achievement tests were administered yearly to all students, and, in addition, teachers were required to give and record the results from the skill tests (called magazine tests) that are part of the Houghton Mifflin reading curriculum.

Thus, both school districts exerted some control over the process of deciding which students were placed in which slots in mainstream reading. And each mandated some level of information gathering about student progress that was of potential use in placement, with Oak Park requiring much more data collection than Elgin.

However, as elaborated below, individual school principals and teachers were allowed a great deal of leeway in making specific placement decisions to fill the available slots, contributing to wide variations in placement practices from school to school.

Information Used in Making Reading Placement Decisions. As noted earlier, mainstream teachers made reading level placements based on some combination of: standardized test information, the child's cumulative record, recommendations from previous teachers, and their own observations and testing. The extent to which each type of information informed placement decisions varied substantially among school districts, schools, and individual teachers. The mandated testing carried out in Oak Park provided each teacher with an independent source of information about the child's level of reading mastery. Because Elgin did not require that this information be collected, comparable data were not available in many Elgin schools. Only those principals in Elgin who initiated annual achievement testing and encouraged or required teachers to systematically give and record the skill tests in the Holt series had created the same information base for teacher decision making. In Elgin schools where this information base did not exist, it was unlikely that the average teacher would or could do the testing that would generate this information.

The absence of testing information about individual children meant that teachers had to rely on placement recommendations from last year's teacher, the child's cumulative record, and any personal testing or observation that the present teacher carried out. Relying on a series of such teacher judgments not tempered by other information can result in a wide gap between a student's appropriate instructional level and the reading level to which the student is assigned.

> Example. While we were in Elgin, there was an effort underway to find a more reliable method for placing children in mainstream reading. One school principal we interviewed had administered two standardized achievement tests to students in his school and compared the results with the students' assigned reading levels. The data, which we reviewed, showed that students assigned to the same reading level in the curriculum had widely varying achievement scores, suggesting that there was a substantial amount of misplacement in mainstream reading.

Monitoring of Placement Decisions. There were pronounced school to school variations not only in the nature of the information used to make reading placement decisions, but also in the degree to which there were checks and balances on the judgment of the teacher who made the decisions. We found some principals who -- through their own involvement in the placement decision process, through designating another staff member (such as the reading specialist) to work with teachers in making these decisions, or through the creation of effective teaching teams -- required individual teachers to reflect on their placement decisions and to justify them. Others did not involve themselves in placement issues, so that crucial reading placement decisions were based entirely on the judgment of the individual classroom teacher.

Individual teacher judgment often led to placement practices based on administrative convenience.

> Example. In Oak Park, some teachers indicated that they did not set up more than three basic reading groups, regardless of students' instructional level. Others did not allow a child to move beyond the level specified as appropriate for the child's grade, even if the child had completed the work at that level.

Degree of Reassessment and Regrouping. A final dimension on which the assessment and placement process in mainstream reading varies dramatically from school to school and from classroom to classroom is in the frequency of reassessment and regrouping. The prevailing practice we documented was that once children were placed at a reading level and within a reading group at the beginning of the year, they stayed with that group for the duration of the year. Reassessment that led to regrouping and reteaching was rare, despite the fact that some children mastered the reading materials offered and some did not. Only a small minority of teachers were carrying out reassessment and regrouping during the school year. Teachers were somewhat more likely to regroup students when they were part of a formal teaching team. To a large extent, however, whether a teacher regrouped students or not was based largely on personal preference; most teachers who regrouped children happened to believe in its value, and they were not being pressed to regroup by their principal or by other teachers.

Implications for Service Quality. Overall, there was a range of practices for placing children in reading levels and groups. At one extreme, teachers were drawing on multiple sources of information to place a student, the placement decision was subject to some form of review by others, and the decision was reassessed during the school year. At the other extreme, teachers were relying primarily on the placement recommendation from the previous year's teacher, the placement decision was not monitored by anyone else, and the student was locked into the placement for a year. Prevailing practice was fairly close to this second pattern, although our standards for service quality would suggest that the first pattern is appropriate. The frequent use of student assessment procedures that shape instructional strategies and the appropriate matching of student readiness with instructional level have been consistently observed in those schools and classrooms most effective in teaching children to read.4/

Referring, Assessing, and Placing Students in Special Instructional Programs

Those who study classification have repeatedly documented the potential harm of removing a child from the mainstream program. Classification as a "special" student -- for remedial reading, bilingual education, special education, etc. -- creates possibilities for varied

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problems, including stigma, lowered expectations, and inferior services.5/ On the other hand, it is also apparent that some children cannot function in the mainstream program, at least not without extra help: to fail to classify them as needing special help is also inappropriate since they are likely to be ignored in the mainstream classroom or to be excluded from school through the discipline system.6/ For the child then, the development of school district procedures for special program classification, the initial student referral process for special programs, and the processes of assessment and placement for these programs are of great importance. To guard against the possibility of misclassification (either through inappropriate action or through the failure to act), standards for service quality require that great care be exercised in implementing these student classification activities, which we divide up as follows:

B-5. Establishing and implementing policies for referring, assessing, and placing students in special instructional programs (school district level).

B-8. Referring students for special program assessment (school and classroom levels).

B-9. Assessing and placing students in special instructional programs (school and classroom levels).

Below, we discuss some important aspects of prevailing practice in carrying out each of these three activities, with special emphasis on the ways in which prevailing practice departs from the careful student classification essential to service quality.

Establishing Policies for Special Program Classification at the District Level. We identified two aspects of prevailing practice in establishing classification procedures that undermine service quality in student classification. First, district procedures allowed wide latitude for school-level discretion that magnified the possibilities for misclassification. Second, those procedures that were established at the district level were seldom reviewed and changed even if they were creating serious problems in classifying students.

Allowing latitude for discretion. Classification procedures for Title I, bilingual education, ESL, special education, and remedial reading in the two districts were spelled out with varying degrees of specificity by district-level requirements, yet in each case important aspects of these procedures were left to school-level discretion, as detailed below.

The district guidelines for Elgin's Title I program focused the program on grades two and three, while Oak Park's focused on grades two to eight. Both districts specified that Title I should serve students who were substantially behind in reading, but neither district mandated a specific assessment plan for identifying the students to be served. Title I students were identified through a combination of achievement test review, teacher referral, and diagnostic testing in combinations that varied from school to school.

For the remedial reading program in Oak Park, there was a policy in the district that all students assisted had to be two years or more behind in grades three to six or one year behind in grades one and two. The district allowed the reading specialists and classroom teachers to work out procedures for selecting individual students (usually a few from each teacher's class) from those who met the general criteria. However, the district staff didn't monitor or enforce these general criteria.

In both districts, the identification of linguistically different children was largely based on staff judgment. School clerks enrolling new children, as well as mainstream teachers, were expected to identify children who came from homes where the primary language spoken was not English, and to gauge whether these children might need bilingual or ESL programs. If a student was referred for assessment for bilingual education in Elgin, a "ten-minute quick and dirty" test (as one tester described it) determined whether the child merited bilingual program placement.

Special education assessment and placement procedures stipulated by the district were, by comparison, much more detailed. To a much greater degree than for the other special instructional programs, tests were prescribed by the district, cutoff scores specified, and the procedural requirements of federal and state law were translated into specific procedures by the district. However, much of the special education assessment and placement was done at the school level and influenced by school-level factors discussed below that were not noted in district policy (e.g., referral and diagnosis was affected by the number of slots available in different special education programs). Thus, even in special education, district policy still allowed for substantial school-level discretion.

Lack of reflection on established procedures. There was no systematic effort in evidence to review regularly the assessment procedures established by the district, such as the use of cutoff scores, despite their often profound impact on children's educational opportunities. Once certain procedures were adopted, they quickly became part of the institutional woodwork -- consistent with our earlier discussion of organizational routines and the psychological reality they take on for those caught up in them. Often, procedures were not reconsidered even when they were creating obvious problems in classifying students.

> Example. In Elgin, according to district policy, students classified as learning disabled had to score 85 or above on an IQ test (although the state requirements only specify that students classified as learning disabled must not be mentally retarded). Children who scored below 80 were eligible for EMH classes. Children who scored between 80 and 85 were not eligible for

> either LD or EMH. Despite the potential raised by these cutoff scores for gaps in service and for misclassification, there had been no changes made in them. Rather, school district personnel accepted them as givens and tried to weave around them in obtaining special educational services for particular children. For instance, several special education teachers told us that children who scored between 80 and 85 were later retested to see whether a change in their score would allow placement in either LD or EMH.

Referring Students for Special Program Assessment. One crucial activity that determines the quality of the special program placement process is the initial referral for assessment, which most often comes from the mainstream classroom teacher. Our interviews with teachers in fifteen schools highlighted a number of factors that shape this initial referral decision; most of our observations are consistent with other research concerning the referral process.

Subjectivity of the referral decision. There are three main reasons that a teacher refers a child for assessment. One possibility is that the child's behavior may represent an extreme and obvious instance of the problem that the special program is supposed to deal with. Such children may, for example, speak no English at all and thus clearly be eligible for the bilingual program, or they may persist over several years in writing their letters without any clear left-right orientation, strongly indicating that they have a serious learning disability.

However, most student problems are not this clearcut, and teachers report that they use two other major cues in deciding to refer children for special class assessment: behavior problems and reading difficulty. There is a substantial body of research that indicates the lack of reliability with which teachers diagnose such behavior and reading problems. A large-scale research study by SRI International indicates that children referred for such special education programs as speech therapy and EMH classes very frequently do not exhibit these problems; rather they have been referred, most frequently, because they have been disruptive in the regular classroom.7/

The other frequent reason for referral is difficulty in the mainstream reading program, which usually means that the child is far behind the middle group of students in the class and/or is experiencing difficulty in mastering the work at the assigned reading level. Of course, the child with a reading problem may also manifest a behavior problem, and the causal relationship between the two is often unclear.

Individual teachers develop personal diagnostic categories -- a frame of reference for diagnosis -- used to classify student behavior and attach an interpretation to it. In a study of school discipline, for instance, Lufler concluded that "What one teacher defined as 'verbal abuse,' another saw as the utterances of a 'typical active student.'"8/ What looks like an emotional problem to one may be seen as a learning disability by another. Personal diagnostic categories often vary according to the race of the child. In one school district, for instance, Burke found that many black children placed in EMH classes had test score profiles that fit the diagnostic profile of a learning disabled child.9/

Despite the demonstrated subjectivity of the teacher judgment on which referral is based, the initial teacher referral frequently has a decisive impact on the entire assessment process. Through his/her initial analysis of the problem and description of student behavior, the referring teacher can affect the predispositions of those who carry out screening and assessment, the type of professional who does the assessment, the assessment instruments employed, and the child's ultimate placement.10/

Referral and the availability of placements. In addition to the teacher's personal diagnostic categories, a second factor affecting initial referral is the set of programs that the school district has set up to deal with special needs and the number of slots available in each program at particular schools.11/ Teachers are unlikely to refer children for assessment if they believe the child has a problem that no existing school district program is prepared to deal with. For example, in Elgin, teachers observed that they did not refer Spanish-speaking children for special education assessment since they knew there were no bilingual special education classes.

Even if a program exists that addresses the need that the referring teacher has identified, the teacher is unlikely to make a referral for a program if he/she knows that there are no available slots in the program. Either the teacher will not make the referral at all, or the teacher will refer the child to another special program in which there are available slots.

> Example. We were frequently told by teachers in both Elgin and Oak Park that they failed to make referrals or that they altered their referral based on the availability of placements. "I know they are filled up in LD, so I am not sending them any more kids this year." "I think this kid is LD, but we only have a half-time LD teacher, so I sent him to Title I."

How do teachers gain knowledge that available slots in certain programs are filled? They may have direct lines of communication with the special program teacher. Or they may experience long delays in obtaining assessment and subsequently stop referring children. Or the school principal may put out the word that a program is full, asking teachers not to make additional referrals. Such administrative practices become particularly important if the district is under a legal obligation to serve all children diagnosed as needing a particular special program. For instance, Mehan and Stearns (cited above) have identified informal mechanisms developed by school districts for regulating the number of referrals in special education.

The "better off" judgment. An important initial consideration for the teacher who makes the referral is whether the child would be "better off" in the special placement. Teachers who don't believe in the value of a particular special program, or don't think that, in general, the program is well-implemented, or don't think the particular teacher implementing the program in their school is competent may decide not to refer a child at all, believing that the child is better off in the mainstream program.

> Example. Some teachers in those neighborhood schools in Elgin that serve substantial numbers of Hispanic students seldom referred students for bilingual programs. They believed that because the receiving schools were often hostile to Hispanic students, students were better off in the mainstream program, even when their mastery of English was slight.

The "better off" judgment is also used to rationalize a recommendation for a placement that the teacher knows is not optimal. For example, when a disruptive child is referred for speech therapy or EMH placement, the teacher may believe that the child will be better off because he'll get some one-to-one attention or because EMH classes are much smaller. This line of thinking is part of the "making do" mindset; the presently available placements are accepted as givens and then the teacher's referral directs the child toward what is viewed as the best placement available, given existing constraints.

The acceptability of referral. Since research on instructionally effective schools indicates that teachers in these schools believe they can teach most children within the mainstream classroom, staff norms in such schools discourage large-scale referral.12/ However, prevailing staff norms about referral in the majority of schools we visited did not attach any stigma to referral. Several teachers, for instance, stated that with present class sizes, mainstream teachers are only able to "teach to the middle," and that they don't have the resources to deal with special needs children. While teachers enter the profession because they like children and want to help them, only 7% of teachers express a preference for dealing with children with special problems.13/ Most teachers want to deal with children within a range they deem normal, and neither they nor their colleagues judge a teacher negatively for making referrals.

Assessing and Placing Students in Special Programs. Referral is typically followed by some form of assessment and a decision about placement. We identified five important aspects of the assessment and placement process that undermine service quality. These are discussed below under the following headings: subjectivity, assessment as a prelude to pullout, gaps in service, informal assessment and placement rules, and lack of reassessment.

Subjectivity. We have indicated above that district-level procedures allow wide discretion in assessing and placing particular students in special programs and that the initial teacher referral is often highly subjective. Thus, service quality depends to a substantial extent on the care with which assessment and placement are carried out after the initial referral is made. One important counterbalance to subjectivity and discretion that sometimes is built into the assessment system is a multi-disciplinary team at the school level that reviews referrals to determine the most appropriate course for subsequent action.

> Example. In Oak Park, it is required that a school-level committee that includes the principal, various special staff, and some mainstream teachers meet each week to deal with referrals. In one school we visited, this committee functioned in close conformity with district procedures. Mainstream teachers came to describe problems they were experiencing with individual children, and the committee helped them analyze these problems. The head of the committee then visited the teacher's classroom to observe, and they discussed whether and how the problem could be dealt with in the mainstream classroom. Only after intervention in the mainstream classroom had been attempted could the teacher refer the child for special program assessment. In this case, the committee took into account varying perceptions of the child's problem and recommended a process for assessment.

In other schools we visited in Elgin and Oak Park, no such mechanisms were in effective operation. The lack of such multiple perspectives opens the door for potentially damaging subjectivity to operate. A teacher's referral may be routed directly to a particular special program teacher, consistent with the referring teacher's hunch about the nature of a child's problem. Particular specialists have professional biases in interpreting problems that can lead to starkly different diagnoses. Those with differing professional orientations choose different test instruments (e.g., personality inventories vs. perceptual tests) that can lead to differing recommendations for assessment and placement. Even when a multidisciplinary team exists on paper, it can often function as merely a sign-off group for the conclusions of a single professional. One objective reflection of this variability, for instance, is the wide school-to-school variation in the rates of LD placement in both Oak Park and Elgin, cited in Chapter 4.

When adequate checks against the biases of the referring teacher or the individual specialist are not operating, assessment becomes more like verification, with the "objective" testing used to legitimate the individual teacher's or specialist's judgment.

Assessment as a prelude to pullout. When a child is referred for special program assessment, the prevailing focus is on determining whether or not the child has a problem that merits partial or complete separation from the mainstream program. Except in rare instances (for example in the Oak Park school discussed above), the assessment does not include scrutiny of the referring teacher's classroom situation to pinpoint improvements that could be made there to serve the child better. Nor does assessment often result in the specialist going into the mainstream classroom to assist the child. Overwhelmingly, if it is determined that children need special services, they are recommended for a pullout program. This was the typical placement offered in both districts for Title I, remedial reading, bilingual education, ESL, and various special education placements.

It is sometimes argued that the existence of such pullout programs is the result of federal and state categorical funding and regulations. However, as we argued earlier, the basic tendency of bureaucratic organizations to move toward fragmented service delivery is the underlying cause of the pullout phenomenon.

> Example. The remedial reading teachers in Oak Park have great leeway in defining their roles. However, all of the remedial reading teachers spent most (or in some cases all) of their time working with individual students on a pullout basis. Similarly, Title I teachers working in the same schools also spent most of their time providing pullout instruction. Thus, the Title I program (which is federally funded) and the remedial reading program (which is locally funded) operated in a nearly identical pullout fashion.

Gaps in service. Misclassification arises not only from subjectivity in assessment and placement, but also from gaps in available service. Like the teacher making an initial referral, those responsible for making assessment and placement decisions are not likely to recommend that a child needs a program that does not exist or that currently has no slots available.

> Example. As noted in Chapter 3, Oak Park served about 9% of all its students through remedial reading programs, while Elgin did not have any remedial reading services available in non-Title I schools. Even in Elgin's Title I schools, services were focused on children in grades two and three. Thus, most children in Elgin with reading problems had to be kept in the mainstream classroom or classified as handicapped. Since LD placement required an 85 IQ score, based on school district policy, EMH was often the only special placement available for students with reading problems who scored below 85 on the IQ test.

This example underscores a major point made in Chapter 4: the substantial and often unrecognized impact that school district budgeting and program planning decisions have on the configuration of services available to students.

One group of students for whom gaps in service raise particularly serious problems are those who exhibit more than one of the major problems for which particular special services are normally provided, such as the Spanish-speaking child who has a learning disability or child with muscular dystrophy who is not otherwise handicapped but needs remedial reading help because he has missed so much school. The limited ability of various special programs to cooperate, noted in Chapter 4, creates serious difficulties in securing appropriate services for such children, as does the norm operating in both districts that discourages "double-serving" of children.

Informal placement procedures. To cope with the difficulties of assessment and the lack of sufficient program slots, educators resort to a variety of informal practices that depart from official procedures, many of which have been discussed above:

- If too few slots are available in a program, school staff delay the assessment process.
- If too few slots are available in a program, children are prioritized in terms of the severity of their problem.
- Vague tests, such as the cursory bilingual placement tests in Elgin, are used consciously or unconsciously to regulate the number of students placed in a program.
- Children are referred to alternative special services that might give them some "extra help" if an appropriate placement is not available.
- Children are seen unofficially by special teachers who are not really supposed to deal with their problem, a practice that teachers call "bootlegging."

In carrying out such informal practices, one can see two major patterns of educator action. First, some educators passively acquiesce to the limits that the system formally and informally sets up. Teachers with such an orientation, for instance, are primarily invested in working with those they regard as "my children" and speak of "closing my door on the rest of the system." They become inured to what the system does to children beyond their doorstep.14/

Second, some teachers act on a broader perspective by trying to obtain or provide appropriate services for children in ways that stretch their minimum responsibilities.

Example. In Elgin, one LD teacher in a school

> that lacked Title I remedial reading services provided tutorial help to children she knew were not learning disabled, classifying this activity officially as "diagnostic assessment." Another LD teacher in a school where many staff members disliked Hispanic children encouraged mainstream teachers to send her any children "they didn't want to deal with."

Even such concerned educators, however, tend to accept many of the systems's established routines as givens that can't be changed. They are willing to work extra hours and stretch their responsibilities to help children with special needs, but they are unlikely to mount a vigorous campaign to change the basic organizational routines and frames of reference that give rise to these problems. They continue to act within the "making do" mindset that allows the prevailing practices of their colleagues that undercut service quality to continue.

Lack of reassessment. As is the case with reassessment and regrouping within the mainstream reading program, once a child is placed in a particular special placement, there is only limited reassessment and replacement. Special placements are typically regarded either as permanent or as existing for a set length of time. Thus, there is limited flexibility in moving children out of a special service based on an analysis of their individual progress, particularly during the school year.

> Example. Developmental First Grade in Elgin (DFG) began as a small flexible program in which children who were judged not ready to enter first grade were given special help, often for a few months before they were integrated into a

mainstream first grade class. However, the program has been expanded with state funding and is now strictly a one-year program separate from the maintream first grade with no movement from DFG into the mainstream first grade during the year.

Understanding Assessment and Placement Across Classification Systems

Much research on assessment and placement has been focused on understanding these processes within particular classification systems, especially the special education classification system. The present research illustrates the importance of understanding how assessment and placement practices are interrelated across classification systems. This cross-system perspective underscores several points helpful in thinking about ways to enhance service quality.

First, our research reinforces conclusions reached by others concerning the extent to which supposedly objective classification processes are in fact highly subjective and are affected by organizational and political forces that have nothing to do with the characteristics of the child. Conclusions reached through the study of a particular classification system (e.g., special education) have been shown to apply to other classification systems (e.g., bilingual education).

Second, our research emphasizes the importance of understanding dynamics that cut across particular classification systems, because the child does not experience classification systems in isolation, but rather in combination. For instance, the likelihood of an inappropriate placement in EMH is greatly enhanced if this is the only special placement open in a particular school.

When one studies individual classification systems and finds defects in their assessment practices, one is sometimes tempted to conclude that these deficiencies can be avoided by minimizing the number of children who are assessed and placed in this particular system. This conclusion may sometimes be warranted, but it should only be reached after looking at the alternatives that will actually confront the child. Are the potential negative effects of placement in a Title I pullout program or a self-contained LD class worse than the negative effects of keeping the child in the mainstream program with the possibility of continued misclassification there and of eventual exclusion through the discipline system? A cross-system perspective sensitizes us to the importance of investigating such questions.

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CHAPTER 6. ACTIVITY CLUSTER C. COORDINATING AND PROVIDING INSTRUCTION

So far, we have discussed two of the three clusters of activities related to student classification and reading that affect the quality of services to children. Through Activity Cluster A, the structure for providing services to children is established. Through Activity Cluster B, children are assigned a place within that structure. Through Activity Cluster C, discussed in this chapter, children are provided with instructional services and this instructional process is coordinated on a day-to-day basis.

In drawing conclusions about the process of instruction, we are significantly limited by the scope of the study. We did not systematically observe the process of instruction in any school, nor were we, except in a few limited instances, able to obtain data concerning the impact of instruction on student growth and progress. Despite these limitations, it is possible for us to draw some conclusions from interviews and documentary evidence about the character of the instructional process as it relates to student classification and reading and, particularly, about the ongoing process of coordinating instruction.

The key activities in Cluster C are presented in Table

6-1 along with examples of related sub-activities. While we list two activities (C-1 and C-2) that reflect federal and state impact on instruction and instructional coordination, we do not discuss these activities further below, because the impact of federal and state actions is slight compared with the impact of actions at the school district, school, and classroom levels. We have divided our discussion of this local impact into three parts. First, we discuss the problem of overall coordination of the instructional program, with an emphasis on those problems that arise in coordination between the mainstream reading program and the various special instructional programs. Second, we discuss instruction and the coordination of instruction within the mainstream reading program. Third, we discuss instruction and the coordination of instruction within individual special instructional programs.

Providing Overall Coordination for Instruction at the School District and School Levels

To a greater or lesser extent, school district administrators provide ongoing overall coordination for the separate organizational units that are charged with the responsibility to teach students to read. As the two relevant key activities indicate, this overall coordination takes place at both the school district and school levels:

C-3. Coordinating between central office staff who are responsible for mainstream reading and for special instructional programs

Table 6-1. Key Activities and Examples of Sub-Activities in Activity Cluster C: Coordinating and Providing Instruction

FEDERAL AND STATE LEVELS

C-1. Establishing federal and state requirements concerning the instructional process and the coordination of instruction. Includes such sub-activities as:

- C-1.1 Specifying appropriate curriculum content and procedures through regulations.
- C-1.2 Providing financial support for school district special program administrators.

C-2. Enforcing federal and state requirements concerning the instructional process and the coordination of instruction. Includes such sub-activities as:

- C-2.1 Reviewing school district proposals for conducting special programs.
- C-2.2 Visiting special program classrooms to review program quality.

SCHOOL DISTRICT LEVEL

C-3. Coordinating between central office staff who are responsible for mainstream reading and for special instructional programs. Includes such sub-activities as:

- C-3.1 Clarifying issues of conflicting or unclear responsibilities among district-level staff.
- C-3.2 Monitoring the overall process of reading instruction in light of district-level requirements.

C-4. Coordinating instruction in the mainstream reading program, including related staff development. Includes such sub-activities as:

- C-4.1 Monitoring the pace of instruction in mainstream reading.
- C-4.2 Providing staff development for teachers concerning the pacing of reading instruction.

C-5. Coordinating instruction in individual special programs, including related staff development. Includes such sub-activities as:

- C-5.1 Monitoring the use of curriculum materials in individual special programs.
- C-5.2 Providing staff development assistance to special program teachers concerning the use of curriculum materials.

(Table 6-1 continued)

SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM LEVELS

- C-6. Coordinating among school staff who carry out mainstream reading and special instructional programs. Includes such sub-activities as:
    - C-6.1 Clarifying the responsibilities of teachers who teach reading to the same child.
    - C-6.2 Monitoring the process for student referral and assessment.
- C-7. Coordinating instruction in the mainstream reading program, including related staff development. Includes such sub-activities as:
    - C-7.1 Monitoring the use of supplementary materials in the mainstream reading program.
    - C-7.2 Providing staff development concerning the use of supplementary materials within the mainstream reading program.
- C-8. Coordinating instruction in individual special programs, including related staff development. Includes such sub-activities as:
    - C-8.1 Monitoring the use of reading instruction materials in special programs.
    - C-8.2 Coordinating the work of staff members in a particular school who teach in the same special program.
- C-9. Providing instruction in the mainstream reading program. Includes such sub-activities as:
    - C-9.1 Introducing new skills through small group or individual instruction.
    - C-9.2 Informally assessing student progress.
- C-10. Providing instruction in individual special programs. Includes such sub-activities as:
    - C-10.1 Introducing new skills through small group or individual instruction.
    - C-10.2 Informally assessing student progress.

(school district level).

C-6. Coordinating among school staff who carry out mainstream reading and special instructional programs (school and classroom levels).

Student classification and coordination of services are two sides of the same coin. By classifying students, school districts create major coordination problems that must be addressed if classified students are to experience coherence in instructional experiences. Given the strong tendency toward fragmentation of effort at both the school district and school levels, it is unrealistic to think that overall coordination at either level will somehow "happen naturally" in a manner that is widespread and consistent enough to achieve coherent instructional services for children. Individuals at both the school district and school levels -- other than those with formal administrative authority -- do occasionally develop friendships, alliances, and informal modes of cooperation that foster coordination between programs. However, the resulting coordination is exceptional and is easily destroyed through such factors as changes in program funding and staff changes.

Only those individuals with formal administrative authority at the point where the appropriate lines on the organizational chart come together have the potential to achieve consistent coordination. At the district level, this means the superintendent and others who have the line authority over all instructional programs. At the school level, this means the principal.

The Need for Consistent District-Level Coordination

As indicated in Chapter 4, school district leaders with the authority to provide overall leadership on instructional issues have a multitude of concerns and devote only intermittent attention to coordinating the Cluster A activities through which the structure of services is established. Their attention to the coordination of programs and services on a day-to-day basis is even more inconsistent. A telling indicator of this lack of coordination is the fact that top level administrators are often not aware of important specifics of how the instructional program is being implemented at the school level, even in a small school district.

> Example. As part of a district-wide reorganization of the instructional program, the Oak Park school district required that sixth grades, which had formerly been organized departmentally with teachers specializing in one subject, should be reorganized into self-contained classrooms where homeroom teachers taught all subjects. In one of the eight elementary schools, teachers retained the departmentalized structure without informing the central office. In our interviews three years later, the main line administrator to whom school administrators reported indicated that she was not aware that the departmental approach was being maintained at this school.

The implementation of the bilingual program in Elgin is a good illustration of the difficulties that arise when top administrators don't anticipate and resolve problems that cut across the areas of authority of their subordinates and provide ongoing coordination. By placing bilingual programs in mostly Anglo schools where teachers and principals were by and large not experienced in dealing with Hispanic and Asian children, the central administration generated tensions between the receiving schools and the bilingual program that seriously threatened service quality. For example, these was no clearcut expectation established that the work of the bilingual and the mainstream classroom teachers who dealt with the same children should be coordinated, and this coordination seldom took place. There was no program of staff development for the mainstream teachers involved to help them make instructional plans. In one school we visited, a mainstream teacher with Hispanic children in her class sent them out in the hall to color while she taught reading to the Anglo children. Such problems, which cut across mainstream and special programs, can only be resolved through continuing supervision from those who have formal authority over all relevant pieces of the organization.

While problems of overall coordination are sometimes striking, as in the example above, they are often subtle and complex, the result of multiple influences that can only be recognized through close ongoing coordination efforts. For instance, special teachers who are half-time in one building and half-time in another (some LD, Title I, and bilingual teachers) generally have severely limited contacts with mainstream teachers, as compared with full-time special teachers. This lack of integration into the school staff undercuts coordination of student classification and of instruction. Yet district administrators are generally not aware of the detrimental impact of half-time staff assignments, whose negative effect is increased by the fact that half-time staff are shifted from one school to another more frequently than full-time staff.

Resolving Dual Responsibility Issues. One important coordination problem that regularly arises if top leadership is not involved in coordinating instruction is the failure to resolve dual responsibility issues in a way that benefits children. Almost all special program teachers have dual lines of responsibility: on the one hand, to a school principal and, on the other, to a central office coordinator for their program (e.g., the special education coordinator). Although formal authority for supervision should rest with one of these people, it is clear that both the principal and the central office coordinator should have some role in coordinating what the special program teacher does. The teachers' classroom instruction practices need to be consistent with an appropriate approach to their special field, and this suggests the need for supervision from the special program coordinator. Special program teachers also need to coordinate with other teachers at the building level, and this suggests the need for accountability to the principal. Frequently one or both of a teacher's supervisors fails to exercise supervisory responsibilities, claiming that the teacher in question answers to the other supervisor. As one principal told us, "The special education coordinators supervise their own teachers. I don't get involved."

To clarify the specifics of dual coordination responsibilities on paper and to make this plan work day-to-day requires continuing action from those with formal authority over both the building principal and the special program coordinators.

Coordinating Student Transitions. Another problem of overall coordination to which insufficient attention is paid is a student's transition from one classification to another (from the bilingual program to a mainstream classroom, from self-contained special education to a mainstream classroom, from third to fourth grade, from Hawthorne School to Douglas School). There is frequently no communication between those who have worked with the child in the past and those who will work with him/her in the future, nor is planning carried out to smooth the transition from one curriculum to another.

> Example. Two different reading instruction systems are used in the mainstream and bilingual programs in Elgin. However, no one has the responsibility to plan for facilitating the child's transition from one system to another and to see that the transition plan is carried out.

Again, such problems are likely to fall between the cracks unless top leadership takes a hand in resolving them.

Coordinating Staff Development and Assistance. Another key problem that stems from lack of overall coordination is that staff development focused on essential issues in service coordination that cut across mainstream and special programs frequently does not occur. Special program coordinators only have a mandate to provide staff development to those in their special programs. Directors of staff development have broader responsibilities on paper, but they are usually located well down in the administrative hierarchy and don't have the mandate to initiate staff development focused on sensitive service coordination issues. Thus, it is unlikely that an effective program of staff development and assistance can be mounted to address issues like transition from bilingual to mainstream programs or how to teach learning disabled children in the mainstream classroom unless the staff development effort has the active continuing support of top leadership.1/

The Need for Consistent School-Level Coordination

The problems of overall coordination that arise at the district level are recapitulated at the school level. Only the principal has the potential at the school level to deal with problems of overall program coordination between mainstream and special programs. Yet, as we have documented earlier, the majority of principals do not tackle these coordination problems, deferring to the authority of central office coordinators and to the professional autonomy of mainstream and special teachers.

When principals adopt this laissez-faire approach, one serious service quality problem that occurs is the failure to fix the responsibility for reading instruction. Who has the responsibility for teaching particular children to read and for seeing that their reading instruction experience has continuity? In the leadership vacuum created by the laissez-faire principal, this question often goes unanswered.

When a child is participating in the mainstream reading program and is also involved in a pullout reading experience, there is characteristically no regular communication or planning between the teachers involved.

> Example. A group of mainstream teachers in one school we visited had regrouped their students for reading. We asked one of these teachers who received students under this regrouping scheme whether any of the children to whom she taught reading were involved in special pullout programs,

> like Title I or LD resource. She replied, "I don't know. The homeroom teacher handles all that."

Such failures in communication often result in a child being taught to read according to two entirely different instructional strategies, forcing a child who is already behind in reading to deal with different texts, different teaching methods, different vocabulary.

> _Example_. One Elgin administrator reviewed the new vocabulary introduced at comparable levels of the curriculum in Holt (the mainstream reading program) and Open Court (the program frequently used in LD resource classes). Many children receiving both mainstream reading instruction and LD resource help would be dealing with both at the same time. Open Court introduced 135 new words and Holt introduced 143 new words in the sections examined. However, _only 18 words_ were common to both. Thus, a child in the mainstream program alone would be expected to learn 143 new words, while a child with reading problems also involved in LD resource would have to master 260 new words.

Another frequent mix-up in coordinating the individual child's reading experience between mainstream and special programs occurs when a pullout reading experience is _substituted for_ the mainstream reading experience. The intent of most pullout experiences is to supplement reading instruction in the mainstream classroom, but teachers left to their own devices often use the pullout experience as a substitute for mainstream reading instruction. The mainstream teacher and the special program teacher may schedule children's pullout experiences during the time when they would normally receive mainstream reading instruction. Or if the mainstream teacher believes that a child is "getting her reading" in an LD resource room, a bilingual program, or a remedial reading program, the mainstream teacher may deemphasize or eliminate the child's participation in the mainstream reading program, even if the child is physically present during mainstream reading instruction. We cited an extreme example of this practice above in describing the teacher who put Hispanic children in the hall during reading instruction time.

The perception that a child is getting his reading somewhere else justifies in the teacher's mind the failure to teach that child reading. In the worst case, if the mainstream and special program teachers do not plan cooperatively, each may make the same mistake: for instance, the mainstream teacher may believe that the child is taught reading in the LD resource room, while the LD teacher may work primarily on perceptual development and believe the child is getting his reading in the mainstream classroom.

To achieve service quality for children, it is imperative that the school principal make sure that there is a coherent reading instruction plan for each child participating both in the mainstream program and in a special pullout program.

Providing and Coordinating Instruction within the Mainstream Reading Program

There are three key activities through which instruction is provided and is coordinated within the mainstream reading program:

C-4. Coordinating instruction in the mainstream reading program, including related staff development (school district level).

C-7. Coordinating instruction in the mainstream reading program, including related staff development (school and classroom levels).

C-9. Providing instruction in the mainstream reading program (school and classroom levels).

The same dynamics inhibiting coordination between the mainstream program and special programs operate within the mainstream program. At the central office level, as described in Chapter 4, the reading coordinator does not have the authority to coordinate the mainstream program, and those who do have this authority are by and large preoccupied with other issues.

At the school level, the majority of principals do not provide consistent instructional leadership in mainstream reading; they defer to the expertise of the classroom teacher. Thus, the classroom teacher receives neither consistent supervision nor consistent staff development help focused on the major problems encountered in teaching reading in the mainstream program. Teacher discretion becomes a trap for the classroom teacher who lacks important skills for teaching children to read. The norms supporting teacher discretion and isolation both prevent such a teacher from asking for help and cause the teacher to resist unsolicited assistance or supervision.2/

Service coordination in the mainstream program is sometimes achieved through team teaching, a potential source, for instance, of useful mutual assistance for teachers. However, one must carefully analyze those situations labeled "teaming" to determine how much actual coordination of teachers' efforts is in fact taking place. As we indicated in Chapter 3, teacher collaboration can take one or more of these three forms:

- Collaboration in regrouping students for reading instruction.
- Collaboration in planning for reading instruction.
- Collaboration in the teaching process.

Under close analysis, many "team teaching" efforts turn out to involve only regrouping or regrouping plus minimal and infrequent joint planning or information-sharing. Regrouping without adequate collaboration in planning is merely a form of departmentalization. Whether teachers indicate that they teach in self-contained classrooms or as part of a team, the crucial issue to be investigated is whether coordination and staff development are actually taking place that focus on critical issues that determine the quality of mainstream reading services.

We have already seen how giving mainstream teachers wide discretion in the assessment process can result in placement at inappropriate reading levels and inappropriate referral for special program assessment. The following examples illustrate the types of inappropriate instructional practices that can result when teachers have unchecked discretion in the instructional process itself.

One problem that creates difficulties for children, for instance, is the pace of instruction, a problem illustrated by the differing responses of Elgin and Oak Park to the introduction of a new basal reading program. When these new reading programs were introduced in both Oak Park and Elgin, teachers found that their children were below the expected grade levels indicated by the publishers and could not move through the curriculum as quickly as recommended. Over the intervening years, Oak Park has redefined the appropriate pace for using the curriculum, while Elgin has sought to maintain the publisher's expectations by moving children through the curriculum at the pace recommended by the publisher. Many Elgin teachers we interviewed felt that an inappropriate pace of instruction caused students to move through the curriculum too quickly and led to a lack of mastery.

Lack of reteaching is another problem that arises in the mainstream reading program when instructional leadership is lacking. The commitment of both Oak Park and Elgin to one main basal reader has many potential advantages for program continuity. However, as teachers follow the program defined by the basal reader, some children studying a unit that is supposed to teach a particular skill fail inevitably to master that skill. (As indicated in Chapter 5, if the district did not require the regular testing of children that was supposed to be part of the reading program, then the teacher might not have even been aware of this problem.) However, even teachers who were aware frequently failed to regroup and reteach; they merely kept children who failed with their original group and moved on, sometimes with the rationale that the curriculum would touch on this skill again later. Teachers often lack the skills needed for reteaching or lack supplementary materials needed to reteach. Without someone monitoring the instructional process to emphasize the importance of reteaching and to provide needed materials and skill training, the prevailing practice is not to reteach.

Providing and Coordinating Instruction in Individual Special Programs

Three key activities fall in this area:

C-5. Coordinating instruction in individual special programs, including related staff development (school district level).

C-8. Coordinating instruction in individual special programs, including related staff development (school and classroom levels).

C-10. Providing instruction in individual special programs (school and classroom levels).

In the course of discussing other activities in Clusters A, B, and C, we have already analyzed the major issues that arise in providing and coordinating instruction in individual special programs.

For example, special program teachers are sometimes not supervised by either central office specialists or by the building principal, so that these teachers make crucial instructional decisions inappropriately without any checks on their work. This can lead to wide variations in the way a particular special service is provided that stem primarily from variations in the teacher's professional training rather than variations in student need. Some learning disabilities teachers we interviewed, for instance, described their work primarily as remedial reading instruction, while others strongly believed that teaching remedial reading was not their job and that their appropriate focus was on perceptual training.

For example, special program teachers could often be of great help in aiding mainstream teachers, either by advising them about appropriate methods for dealing with students' special needs within the mainstream classroom or by working directly with the child within the mainstream classroom. However, the special program teacher's role is typically defined as seeing students on a pullout basis.

For example, special program teachers who see children on a pullout basis are usually supposed to be providing a reading instruction experience that supplements the child's mainstream experience, yet if they do not plan collaboratively with the mainstream teacher, their instructional program may conflict with or replace the child's mainstream reading experience.

The Potential for Appropriate Service Coordination

Our research results concerning Cluster C activities focused primarily on instructional coordination issues.

On the one hand it highlights the lack of effective instructional coordination, especially as it is provided to children at risk, that prevails in most school districts. Further, it uncovers the organizational dynamics and the frames of reference that create these service quality problems, demonstrating that these shortcomings do not typically stem from personal malice toward children on the part of individual educators, but rather, for instance, from the failure of each teacher's isolated attempt to provide services to a child to add up to a coherent educational experience.

On the other hand, however, the research highlights the possibility that practical alternatives to fragmented service delivery are possible, by demonstrating that some administrators and teachers, working under the constraints of the existing system, have been successful in coordinating the instructional process in ways that benefit children.

Notes

1/In previous research, we have documented the fragmented nature of staff development activities in three urban school districts. See Donald R. Moore and Arthur A. Hyde, Making Sense of Staff Development: An Analysis of Staff Development Programs and Their Costs in Three Urban School Districts (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, 1981).

2/See Seymour B. Sarason et al., "Teaching Is a Lonely Profession," in Psychology in Community Settings (New York: John Wiley, 1966), pp. 74-97; and Ann Lieberman and Lynne Miller, "The Social Realities of Teaching," Teacher's College Record 80 (September 1978).

CHAPTER 7. CRITICAL PREFERRED PRACTICES TO FACILITATE APPROPRIATE STUDENT CLASSIFICATION AND THE RIGHT TO READ

In Chapter 2, we discussed how critical preferred practices can serve as the focus for school reform efforts that will improve children's school experiences. In this chapter, we describe some examples of critical preferred practices for facilitating appropriate student classification and the right to read that we identified through our research. Before describing these preferred practices, we first elaborate on some key points about the nature of critical preferred practices, building on the discussion in Chapter 2.

Some Key Points about Critical Preferred Practices

As noted in Chapter 2, critical preferred practices are specific ways to carry out key educational activities (for instance, ways to gather data about student needs as the basis for school district program planning) that will result in substantial improvements in the quality of educational programs and services for children, including those children at risk who have been systematically shortchanged by the schools.

Below we elaborate on some important characteristics of critical preferred practices that will inform the subsequent presentation of examples drawn from our research.

Achieving Standards for Service Quality by Carrying Out Critical Preferred Practices

In Chapter 2, we cited three standards for achieving service quality that are particularly relevant to issues of analyzing and improving classification and reading instruction. First, critical preferred practices should be implemented that facilitate equal opportunity for access by identifiable groups of students (for instance, minorities, females, students attending a particular school) to the school itself and to specific services that provide reading instruction. Student classification practices should facilitate and not hinder such access. Second, critical preferred practices should be implemented that have been shown through research to foster student progress in learning to read. Again, classification practices should facilitate and not hinder the opportunity for the widest range of students to receive such services. Third, even in the absence of clear research evidence that a particular program will foster student reading progress, critical preferred practices should be implemented that constitute a coherent effort to meet special needs that limit reading progress and to classify students in ways that will maximize the potential benefits and minimize the potential harm of singling some students out for extra or different services.

Our research helps clarify some critical preferred practices aimed at achieving all three standards.

With respect to the first standard, for instance, the present research suggests ways that district-level budget development and program planning can be carried out to reduce the wide discrepancies in service availability among schools that were frequently observed in the two districts.

With respect to the second standard, for instance, previous research concerning instructionally effective schools indicates that teachers in effective schools believe that they can teach most children to read, and that they don't "write off" large numbers of children. The present research underscores some specific practices through which this preferred approach to instruction can in fact be carried out, such as the implementation of consistent procedures for assisting mainstream teachers to deal with children's problem in the mainstream classroom before the child is assessed for special program placement.

With respect to the third standard, for instance, we have documented many ways in which both educational planning and the ongoing coordination of student classification and reading instruction can in fact reflect a coherent effort to meet student needs. For instance, it is essential that multiple sources of information be used in placing students within the mainstream reading program and that this crucial placement decision is not left strictly to one person's judgment. Preferred practices based on the school district's obligation to try systematically to meet special needs are especially important, since it will be many years before more than a small fraction of educational decisions have any convincing basis in research about student outcomes.

Critical Preferred Practices Must Be Sharply Focused on Those Aspects of Educator Activity That Have the Greatest Impact on Service Quality

The attempt to identify critical preferred practices responsive to the three standards described above takes the substantial difficulties in implementing change into account, yet offers hope for basic improvement. While the educational system is composed of multiple complex organizations whose functioning creates serious barriers to improvements in services to children, it is in fact possible to improve services through persistent effort aimed at achieving a limited number of critical objectives. We assume that teaching almost every child to read is one of these objectives, and that this objective merits such priority attention.

In seeking to improve the quality of services affecting children's opportunity to learn to read, we conclude that it is both impossible and counterproductive to attempt modifications in every aspect of educators' behavior through elaborate planning and management systems that have as an ideal the total control of teacher behavior -- the attempt to make the educational program "teacher proof." We believe that teacher judgment and creativity are essential for achieving service quality. But we also believe that teacher judgment and creativity must be exercised within some clear limits prohibiting educational practices that clearly lead to inappropriate services. Respecting teacher creativity and judgment must not become the basis for excusing educational practices that severely undermine a child's opportunity to learn to read.

Identifying critical preferred practices for improving service quality represents an attempt to specify a limited set of educational practices that, if implemented, will make the greatest contribution to improving services to children. When fully spelled out, these practices should provide a clear agenda for reform that can be followed through consistently in carrying out all three clusters of activities analyzed in Chapters 4 through 6 -- establishing the structure of services, assessing and placing children, and providing and coordination instruction.

The reform strategy we recommend is based on the recognition that both the systems management perspective and the organizational patterns perspective contain an important element of truth, but that neither, taken by itself, provides an accurate analysis of the possibilities for changing organizational behavior. In its simplest form, the systems management perspective suggests that administrators can achieve near-total control of subordinates' behavior. In its simplest form, the organizational patterns perspective suggests that fragmentation, the inevitable development of discretion, and the development of idiosyncratic work routines make it impossible to achieve any consistent changes in staff practices through systems management. The goal of total control is unrealistic and often counterproductive; however, substantial reforms that benefit children can be implemented if they are based on a focused agenda and pursued persistently. In Chapters 4 through 6, we have cited examples of the practices of individual school district administrative leaders and individual school principals clearly illustrating that such a reform strategy is feasible.

Critical Preferred Practices Should Typically Permit Options for Implementation

Particular situations in schools and school districts differ. And as the teacher development and participation perspective suggests, teachers have more commitment to implementing reforms if they have a role in determining how they will be carried out. Thus, in defining critical preferred practices, we attempt to define the boundaries of appropriate behavior, not to exhaustively describe each tiny step that should be taken.

> Example. It is a critical preferred practice that school principals take an active role in shaping reading instruction and student classification in

> their schools. One school principal we observed, who had a strong background in reading, became immersed in the specific details of developing and carrying out a reading instruction plan for her school. Another principal, less familiar with curriculum issues, allowed his reading specialist to oversee the specifics of the reading instruction process, giving her his full administrative support to coordinate reading instruction, but regularly reviewing her work. Through differing methods, both were carrying out the same critical preferred practice.

Critical Preferred Practices Must Be "Realistic"

In defining critical preferred practices, one must take into account their feasibility in light of financial, organizational, and political constraints on the educational system.

Consistent with the economic incentives perspective, critical preferred practices should represent a realistic response to the serious financial problems of the educational system, and thus should not entail vast new expenditures. To the greatest extent possible, they should chart different ways of using present resources, including staff. However, implementing critical preferred practices will, by and large, entail some financial expense that must be met either through obtaining additional revenues or reallocating present revenues. As we have argued above, achieving service quality in reading should be a top priority in any public school district, and districts that make a serious commitment to implementing such improvements should recognize the need to allocate financial resources consistent with this priority.

Critical preferred practices must not only be realistic financially, but they must also respond to constraints imposed by the organizational realities of school and school district functioning. Consistent with the organizational patterns perspective, preferred practices should entail carefully targeted changes based on a detailed understanding of the educational system as it exists, rather than idealized plans that ignore, for instance, the inevitability of student classification or the substantial barriers to teacher cooperation created by prevailing teacher norms.

One promising method for identifying critical preferred practices that are realistic responses to organizational constraints is to base them on practices actually observed (albeit in four schools out of twenty) within the realities of the schools we studied. For instance, school principals we studied who take an active hand in shaping the educational program of their schools represent living examples of workable approaches to active school-level planning and coordination. By building on such evidence that particular preferred practices are feasible, we are more likely to identify practices that can be widely implemented through persistent commitment on the part of reformers.

Responding to Political Constraints: Who Can Serve as a Catalyst for Implementing Critical Preferred Practices?

As mentioned above, any plan for implementing critical preferred practices must respond to political restraints, as well as economic and organizational ones. Even if we identify critical preferred practices that respond realistically to issues of finances and organizational capabilities, we know that reforms that will bring substantial improvements in service quality will still be difficult to initiate and achieve. Such changes inevitably threaten to some extent the control over resources and working conditions and customary ways of operating that various interest groups have built up over the years. Thus, even in urging focused changes, we must suggest a strategy for achieving these changes that is politically feasible. Who is in a position, realistically, to begin the systematic process of pressing for these changes? To whom are we addressing this analysis and advice?

Drawing on our own present and past research about the educational process, as well as that of others, we conclude that five groups of people are in the best position to provide the catalyst for implementing critical preferred practices:

- Superintendents of schools and other key central office administrators with major line authority
- School principals
- School board members

o Parent groups

o Citizen groups, including business groups

The first three groups are in a strategic position to push for change because of their positions of formal authority within the educational system and because of the political power that is amassed by people in these formal leadership positions. To reiterate a theme from Chapter 4, those with line authority and with formal legal authority to lead local school districts often fail to exercise their authority, giving in to the organizational and political constraints that typically dominate them. However, the legitimate authority of school superintendents, principals, and school boards is recognized within the system and can be brought to bear in pressing for changes in educational practice, if the reform effort is focused and persistent.

The last two groups -- parent and citizen groups -- are in a strategic position to push for change in proportion to their ability to exert informed persistent pressure on the educational system that is focused on achieving improvements in service quality for children. As our national study of child advocacy groups documents, they can act as a catalyst for reform by becoming an effective force in the conflict and bargaining that shapes educational decision making, and they can serve as valuable allies for those with formal authority who want to press for improvements and need external support in doing so.1/ When they carry out careful analyses of the educational system, parent and citizen groups, not caught up in the established organizational routines and the prevailing frames of reference of educators, can press for systemic reforms that benefit children.

To the extent that two or more of these five groups work in collaboration (for example, when school superintendents and the school board are in accord), the opportunities for reform are substantially increased.

In identifying these five groups as the most likely catalysts for change, we do not underestimate the role that teachers and other educators must play. Indeed, our recommendations for critical preferred practices are based on respect for the realities of the educator's job. However, given the fragmentation of the educational system, we see little possibility that teachers themselves will be the major initiators of the necessary organizational change. As illustrated in Chapter 5, even those teachers who exhibit a high level of concern about children tend to operate within the "making do" mindset. They exert extra effort on behalf of children within the constraints of presently prevailing practices, rather than calling these practices into question. Many committed teachers would welcome and support basic changes in practice, but they will not initiate the needed reform efforts. Nor, based on evidence concerning the collective bargaining process, can teachers' unions be counted on to press for preferred practices very frequently.2/

Critical Preferred Practices for Enhancing Appropriate Classification and the Right to Read: Some Examples

In the balance of this chapter, we discuss and illustrate some examples of critical preferred practices that, based on our research data, will sustantially increase the opportunities for children to be classified appropriately and to gain a better chance to learn to read. (While we have a major concern with improving the education of children at risk, implementing these preferred practices will be of general benefit to a wide spectrum of children enrolled in public schools.)

Because of the exploratory nature of this research project, we have only presented illustrations of critical preferred practices, both to demonstrate the usefulness of this method of analysis and to translate some of our most clearcut research findings into recommendations for reform. We also have tried to illustrate the merits of our analytical approach sufficiently so that these examples can serve as a starting point for concerned educators or citizens who wish to conduct their own project for identifying critical preferred practices for reform in their own school district.

However, we regard this as an incomplete and preliminary list, which we hope to expand and refine in the future through collaboration with others.

Establishing School District Budget Priorities

In Chapter 4, we described a set of prevailing practices for determining school district needs and related expenditures that we call incremental planning. In the incremental planning process, the present year's budget is used as "the base" in planning for next year and as a proxy for student needs. Planners then make minor adjustments to the base not guided by clear priorities for student growth and progress. And they assume that funding sources currently supporting particular programs and services will continue to fund them. We stressed the pivotal importance of these program planning and budgeting decisions in shaping the quality of student classification practices and of reading programs and services.

Preferred Practice: Top district leadership should establish expenditure priorities that reflect a major commitment to helping all students to learn to read. In initiating the district's budget and program planning process, particularly in a period of declining resources, planners should set financial priorities that reflect a clear set of instructional priorities, and teaching all children to read should be at the top of this priority list. The district should recognize, for instance, an obligation to allocate unrestricted local and state funds to meet special students' needs related to handicap, linguistic differences, and poverty that keep students from learning to read; they should not assume that these needs must be met solely with federal and state categorical funds.

> Example. Oak Park regards the assignment of a reading specialist to each school to be essential to their reading instruction strategy and has, for instance, raised class size rather than abolishing these positions (which are supported through unrestricted funds). Based on evidence that these reading specialists play a significant role in bringing coherence to mainstream reading instruction at the school level and that they provide a special program placement that is preferable to more stigmatizing special education placements, we see this resource allocation decision as one that clearly benefits children.

Preferred Practices: The school district should assemble for internal planning purposes and release to the public a comprehensive analysis of student needs and of programs and services designed to meet these needs. As documented in Chapter 4, the use of present budget allocations as a proxy for future student needs obscures the failure to base budget decisions on an adequate analysis of student needs and of programs and services to meet these needs. In Table 7-1, we list some information that should be brought together to inform a planning process that will in fact allow planners to base the educational program on an accurate analysis of student needs. While this list may seem forbidding, much of

Table 7-1. Information Needed to Facilitate Budget Planning Based on Student Needs

- The number of students enrolled solely in the mainstream instructional program, in the various self-contained special education programs, in the various special education resource programs, in bilingual education programs, in ESL classes, and in remedial reading classes. This analysis should indicate the numbers of children, by program, enrolled in more than one special program. All results should be broken down by race and ethnic group, sex, school, grade level, and classroom.

- Means and distributions of reading achievement scores for all students on an annual district-wide test of reading achievement. Test results should be broken down by school, grade level, race and ethnic group, Title I eligibility, and enrollment in special instructional program.

- The results of a language census to identify children who come from a home where English is not the predominant language and to identify, among these children, those who could profit from ESL or bilingual instruction. The language census should be conducted with assistance from an advisory group of parents and should employ sources of information in both the schools and the community.

- The results of a survey to identify children potentially in need of special education who are not served by the current program or who are inadequately served. This survey should be conducted with assistance from an advisory group of parents and should employ sources of information in both the school and community.

- Studies analyzing the effectiveness of various school district programs for teaching children to read.

- A preliminary school district budget, developed in a program budget format, that will enable the reader to determine how much each component of the instructional program will cost, including mainstream classroom instruction, various special programs, central office administration, physical plant, transportation, debt service, etc. The budget should indicate the nature of staffing and services provided by each individual school and their associated costs, including both mainstream and special programs. The budget should indicate the funding source for every expense listed.

- A revenue projection, with the assumptions behind the projection clearly indicated, as well as alternative revenue projections based on differing assumptions.

this information is already collected by the school district, yet it is never available at one place at one time to aid the planning process.

We also recommend that this information be released to the public. While many educators may object that releasing such information would have serious adverse effects, various school districts we have studied in the past have released much of this information without major problems.3/ However, the push to have such information assembled and released will often have to come from the school board or from parent and citizen groups.

Top Level Leadership for Planning and Coordination

If critical preferred practices for classifying children and teaching them to read are to be consistently implemented in a school district, the budgeting process is just the first step. The superintendent of schools and other top line administrators who have formal authority over mainstream and special instructional programs must devote persistent attention to seeing that the needed changes are carried out.

Preferred Practice: Top leadership should provide consistent supervision to insure that student classification and reading instruction services provided to students reflect a coherent plan for meeting student needs. District leadership must communicate to all those responsible for student classification and reading instruction that the district is going to coordinate mainstream and special instructional programs to try to bring maximum coherence to the child's day-to-day school experience. District leadership must make it clear that despite the multiple responsibilities of building principals, bilingual education coordinators, EMH teachers, and the like, and despite their varied perceptions of their roles, these staff members have a major obligation to help see that children learn to read.

District leadership must clarify for all those directing mainstream and special instructional programs that the district is going to make a consistent effort to address the reading-related special needs of all students. They must underscore the district's commitment to move toward an educational program grounded in an analysis of student needs and not based on concepts of "making do" and "triage" when it comes to high priority objectives for student progress. Leadership must also clarify that special instructional programs addressed to such needs as handicaps and language differences are an integral part of this effort and that the district is not merely going through the motions of meeting special needs under the duress of federal and state mandates.

Building on these commitments, district leadership must develop effective mechanisms for collaborative planning among those responsible for the mainstream and special instructional programs, so that problems stemming from organizational fragmentation and from the failure to coordinate dual lines of authority will be minimized. It should become clear, for example, what the balance of administrative responsibilities is for supervising the remedial reading teacher who is responsible both to the reading coordinator and to the building principal, or for the learning disabilities teacher or bilingual teacher who has similar dual lines of responsibility. The resolution of such coordination issues will not happen "naturally"; the top administrators with formal authority to resolve such issues must act.

One important focus of top leadership's concern should be to understand and coordinate the impact of student classification on students' learning experiences. Administrators should, for instance, scrutinize the number of special program teachers at each school, to see whether fragmented decision making has led to distributions of these teachers that create inequities in access to services for children attending particular schools. They must consider, for instance, how to serve students who have multiple needs, children who are especially likely to fall through the cracks.

To allow top administrators to devote ongoing attention to such issues might require some changes in the administrative structure. One possibility, for instance, is that a key line administrator might hire a staff person to work with him/her who would focus consistently on the reading issue, bringing relevant coordination issues and recommendations to the line administrator's attention and acting as a liaison with other administrators.

Selecting School District and School Administrators

Preferred Practice: School district administrators should be selected with strong consideration given to their competence in dealing with reading instruction and student classification issues. One area where school district leadership, as well as leadership from school board members, can help increase service quality is in selecting school district and school administrators. It is often difficult to remove these administrators once they are in place. However, most school districts have substantial flexibility in initial selection decisions for administrative staff. As the systems management perspective suggests, staff selection is a major point of leverage in implementing change, and it is a leverage point that can in fact be employed in the public schools.

Top administrators who wish to follow through consistently on reading and student classification as priorities should develop job requirements for district-level and building-level administrative positions that emphasize competence in these areas, and they should carefully choose people to fill positions who have demonstrated these competencies. In both Elgin and Oak Park, for instance, we interviewed several principals who had a long past history of training and of involvement in instructional program development, and who have continued their active involvement in these issues as school principals.

School-Level Leadership

As has been underscored in this research project and in many others, the school principal's leadership is pivotal in improving services to children. If the school district's top leadership is committed to implementing critical preferred practices but fails to specify and monitor the principal's role in implementing such reforms, these reform plans will by and large not touch children's school experience.

Even if the school district's leadership is not committed to reform, individual school principals have demonstrated that they can bring about substantial improvements in services in their schools, although one can only expect a few exceptional principals to do so without support from the top.

Preferred Practices: School principals should adopt an active leadership style, providing consistent supervision to insure that student classification and reading instruction services provided to students are consistent with preferred practice. In Chapter 4, we distinguished between the principal who adopts an active approach to planning and coordination for reading and classification issues and the principal who adopts a laissez-faire approach. An active approach is essential to achieving service quality. School principals should develop and implement a school-level plan for dealing with critical coordination issues identified in our research, such as role clarification between mainstream and special teachers, student classification within the mainstream reading program, and special program referral. The examples set by such active principals who are currently carrying out critical preferred practicies to deal with these issues in both Oak Park and Elgin clearly demonstrate that such an active leadership style is feasible.

Staff Development

Characteristically, staff development is a diffuse process shaped by fragmented decision making. As our previous research concerning staff development has indicated, a substantial percentage of school district resources is absorbed by such uncoordinated staff development activities, often with no clear gains in service quality.4/ As with other school district resources, those resources devoted to staff development should be more clearly focused on the effort to achieve high priority objectives for student growth.

Preferred Practice: Both the school district and its individual schools should prepare and carry out plans for staff development that are carefully focused on the implementation of critical preferred practices for reading instruction and student classification. Such staff development plans should reflect careful coordination between the school district's stated priorities, the supervision process, and the process of staff development. To increase the effectiveness of this coordinated effort, one crucial mode of staff development should be in-class observation and assistance. Another should be school-level workshops and mutual teacher assistance, based on a school-level staff development plan for helping staff carry out preferred practices.

Particular attention should be paid to the ways in which recommended changes in practice conflict with the established norms and organizational routines, so that staff development can be consciously aimed at modifying those norms and routines that stand in the way of preferred practice (e.g., norms favoring pullout programs). Such a focused approach to staff development in itself conflicts with established norms concerning teacher discretion, and thus staff development leaders must be aware that they are likely to encounter resistance.

Structure of the Mainstream Reading Program

The structure of the mainstream reading program is pivotal to the school and the school district's overall effectiveness in classifying children appropriately and in teaching them to read. If children are placed at the wrong level in the mainstream reading program, if mainstream teachers lack the skills for regrouping and reteaching, if mainstream teachers believe that their responsibility is only to teach the "normal" student, serious deficiencies in services result in both the mainstream program and in special instructional programs.

Below, we provide five examples of critical preferred practices related to the structure of the mainstream reading program.

Preferred Practice: The school district should adopt one main basal reading program for district-wide use. Adopting such a core curriculum helps foster the coherence in reading instruction at the school level that is characteristic of instructionally effective schools.5/ Teachers can more easily understand what is expected of them. Administrators and specialists can more easily provide focused supervision and staff development for teachers. Children who move from one school to another can pick up where they previously left off.

There is considerable research on reading that, carefully reviewed, should yield additional preferred practices concerning the type of basic reading curriculum that will improve service quality. For instance, it appears that curricula facilitating small group, as opposed to "individualized," instruction, result in higher levels of student progress within the constraints of the typical classroom.6/

Preferred Practice: Multiple sources of data about student mastery and multiple staff perspectives should form the basis for student placement within the mainstream reading curriculum. The school district should require, as suggested in Chapter 5, annual achievement testing for all students. Test administration and test result analysis should be timed to help inform individual placement decisions within the mainstream program, to help in identifying children who may need special reading assistance, and to suggest strengths and weaknesses of particular instructional strategies, schools, and teachers.

In addition to achievement testing, teachers should be required to regularly give and record the results of the skills tests that are part of the reading curriculum, and there should also be a school-wide system for using this information in making placement decisions and identifying children who might need special help.

Because of the extreme importance of appropriate placement within the mainstream program, the district should specify a procedure for making this placement decision that draws on both test information and teacher judgment. This decision-making process should include provisions for the systematic review of placement decisions by the principal or another building-level administrator or specialist who helps coordinate the reading program at the school level.

> Example. In several Elgin schools, teachers worked together on grade-level teams. Some teams were quite active. They regrouped students for reading and math through team discussions of each child, drawing on both their own observations and on test information. Teachers on these teams periodically reassessed student placements during the year and regrouped students in an effort to match instruction to the students' levels of skill mastery.

Preferred Practice: Each school should specify a daily time period during which mainstream reading will be taught without interruption. Adopting this preferred practice will help fix the amount of time spent on reading instruction. Time scheduled for reading instruction determines the maximum amount of time students can spend actively engaged in instruction, which, in turn, is strongly correlated with student achievement.7/ By also specifying the time of the day in which mainstream reading is taught school wide or at

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particular grade levels, the school can insure that students' active engagement in learning to read will not be disrupted by band rehearsals, assemblies, fire drills, etc. Through such scheduling, school districts can also assure that students will not be pulled out for special instructional programs that would replace, rather than supplement, their mainstream reading instruction experience.

Preferred Practice: The school district should determine an appropriate pace for the use of the basal reading program in light of teachers' experience, rather than automatically adhering to the pace defined by the publisher. As discussed in Chapter 6, establishing an inappropriate pace for mainstream instruction contributes to inadequate skill mastery for substantial numbers of children and unnecessary referrals for special programs. The district should assess the appropriateness of the publisher's recommended pace for instruction and modify that pace in light of experience.

Preferred Practice: The district should develop and carry out a plan to facilitate regrouping and reteaching within the mainstream curriculum, including the appropriate use of supplementary materials. Misplacement in the mainstream program and excessive referrals for special programs result in part from the lack of clear expectations that teachers should regroup and reteach children who initially fail to master particular reading skills and from the unavailability of appropriate supplementary materials for the reteaching process. Through a concerted program of curriculum development, staff development, and supervision, the school district needs to define and carry out a plan that will address regrouping and reteaching issues like the following: How can test results be interpreted to determine when reteaching is advisable? What regrouping methods are most feasible within the constraints of a regular classroom? What supplementary materials are appropriate for reteaching particular skills?

> Example. In Elgin, the district recognized the need for reteaching by adopting a second basal reading series geared for students who had trouble with the Holt series, along with varied supplementary skill development materials. Also, in several Elgin schools we visited, Title I teachers worked closely with mainstream teachers and suggested supplementary materials for use in the mainstream program.

Structure of Reading-Related Special Programs

Preferred Practice: Students at every school should have available to them special services responding to needs that inhibit progress in reading, and these services should be organized to limit students' separation from the mainstream program. We have already discussed the ways in which inadequate funding and fragmented planning create dysfunctional configurations of services to students, services that often vary dramatically from school to school without any clear relationship to variations in student need. The service quality model suggests that students at every school should have an appropriate range of special services available, responsive to handicap, linguistic difference, and other serious barriers to learning to read.

Remedial reading and learning disabilities resource services are, based on our analysis, two particularly valuable services to make available in each school. Neither is characteristically set up as a full-time pullout program and each carries with it a moderate expectation that the child's problem can, in fact, be remediated. Concerning LD placement, for instance, Hobbs observes:

> The term learning disability has appeal because it implies a specific neurological condition for which no one can be held particularly responsible, and yet it escapes the stigma of mental retardation. There is no implication of neglect, emotional disturbance, or improper training or education, nor does it imply a lack of motivation on the part of the child.8/

The availability of both remedial reading and LD resource in each school can forestall the use of more stigmatizing placements like EMH, which have often been the only option available to teachers who felt they couldn't deal with particular children in the mainstream classroom.

Preferred Practice: The responsibilities of special program staff should entail substantial involvement with the mainstream program. Another way to minimize the dangers of special program placement is to define special staff job

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responsibilities as entailing three forms of involvement with the mainstream program: assisting mainstream teachers in the development of the mainstream reading program, assisting mainstream teachers who have referred children for special program assessment to first attempt modifications in their own classrooms, and assisting children placed in special programs within the mainstream classroom rather than on a pullout basis. For instance, we found a few remedial reading teachers in Oak Park doing all three of these things, although the typical remedial teacher gravitated toward working with individual students on a pullout basis.

Preferred Practice: Part-time special program staff should be used as little as possible. As discussed in Chapter 6, when special program staff for special education, bilingual education, Title I, etc., are part-time in a school, this seriously undercuts their integration into the school's teaching staff. To the greatest extent possible, planners should strive to use full-time staff. For instance, Oak Park has assigned both a remedial reading teacher and an LD resource teacher to each school with more than 400 students, while the Title I teachers in Elgin are full-time in their schools, and these teachers are generally well-integrated into their respective schools. Their integration into their schools contrasted sharply with the isolated "special" teachers in both districts who split their time among two or more schools.

Preferred Practices: Referrals for special program assessment should be screened by a multidisciplinary team that should first help the referring teacher modify mainstream classroom practices and if that fails, specify an assessment process that minimizes the likelihood of bias. To guard against subjectivity in the referral process and to minimize inappropriate referrals, it is crucial that all referrals for special programs be initially handled by a functioning school-level team that discusses the referral with the teacher, visits the classroom to better understand the child and to suggest modifications in the mainstream classroom that might solve the problem, and works with the teacher to implement these changes. Only if this intervention in the mainstream classroom fails should assessment proceed, and great care should be exercised by the team to insure that the child's problem is not prejudged based on the referring teacher's preliminary diagnosis or the professional orientations of individual team members. As described in Chapter 6, we visited one Oak Park school in which referral practices were quite close to this ideal, illustrating the practicality of such an approach.

Preferred Practice: Consistent standards for judging the appropriateness of student assessment and placement instruments and procedures should be applied across all special programs, and these instruments and procedures should be reviewed regularly in light of advances in assessment practice. One striking pattern that became apparent when we reviewed the student assessment procedures employed across several special programs is that school districts often employ cursory and subjective assessment procedures unless they are pressed to be more specific by federal and state mandates. In part, such procedures function to give school districts flexibility in filling special program placements consistent with current budget and staff limits.

Further, once certain procedures and tests are adopted and become part of the prevailing assessment routine, they are seldom reviewed -- as reflected, for instance, in the persisting use of an 80 cutoff on an IQ test as the basis for EMH placement.

Thus, one preferred practice for student assessment clearly motivated by our analysis of this prevailing patchwork approach is that districts should adopt across-the-board standards for student assessment for all special programs (in terms of quality of test instruments, multidisciplinary procedures, parent involvement, etc.). And all assessment instruments and procedures should be regularly reviewed for continuing appropriateness in light of new knowledge in the assessment field.

Preferred Practice: Plans for regular reassessment of students in special programs should be established and implemented in all special programs, along with plans for facilitating student transition between special programs or back into the mainstream. As indicated in Chapters 5 and 6, reassessment and change of placement are rare in special instructional programs. Typically, programs either run for a set period of time or they are considered permanent. Preferred practice should entail more frequent reassessment of student needs to see whether a different placement would be more appropriate. Reassessment will be of limited value, however, without increased capacity to aid student transitions from one program to another. Someone should have clear administrative responsibility for fostering the transition between particular programs (for instance, from bilingual to mainstream reading, from self-contained learning disabilities class to mainstream).

Preferred Practice: Mainstream and special program teachers who teach reading to the same child must coordinate their work to insure that their reading instruction efforts are complementary. As indicated in Chapter 6, the majority of mainstream and special program teachers who work with the same children do not plan collaboratively. This often results in the use of conflicting methods and materials, or in the failure of one or both of the teachers involved to teach reading to the child, based on the rationale that the child is "getting his reading" elsewhere.

Whenever it is feasible, as indicated above, the special program teacher should work with the child in the mainstream classroom. However, even if the child is seen on a pullout basis, potential problems of program discontinuity can be greatly mitigated if one person is held accountable for insuring that each child has a coherent reading instruction experience and if this person insures that role clarification and regular planning take place among all teachers who teach reading to the same child.

Federal and State Intervention

We have placed the discussion of federal and state intervention last, so that the federal and state role can be considered in light of the clear needs for changes in prevailing practices at the school district and school levels.

As we have discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 and will elaborate in Chapter 8, our analysis calls into question the currently popular view that federal and state regulation constrains local efforts to serve children appropriately and is the primary cause of local program fragmentation. In the school districts we examined, federal and state programs were often the only organized response to special needs that inhibit students' opportunities to learn to read.

State governments, like the Illinois state government, have basic constitutional responsibility to provide equitable public education.9/ The federal government has both constitutional and well-established legislative responsibility to protect the rights of children at risk in the educational process.10/ From the perspective of the service quality model, it is highly desirable that both federal and state governments exercise these responsibilities vigorously and effectively.

The last twenty years of effort to increase educational quality through federal and state intervention has provided a wealth of evidence about preferred educational practices that can form a knowledge base for future federal and state intervention, information that was lacking at the beginning of the reform period.

Below, we provide two examples of critical preferred practices that should be carried out by federal and state governments to enhance service quality.

Preferred Practice: Federal and state governments should vigorously enforce requirements for non-discrimination assessment in those special programs that affect children at risk. Both federal and state governments have numerous legal obligations to insure non-discriminatory student asssessment. The evidence that discrimination in assessment exists (for instance, EMH assessment) is clearcut. The remedies for this discrimination through implementing preferred referral, assessment, and placement practices are also clear. Non-discriminatory assessment is thus an important and feasible focus for vigorous federal and state intervention that will benefit children.

Preferred Practice: Federal and state governments should review and, when appropriate, alter funding mechanisms to increase local incentives for implementing preferred practices. As discussed earlier in this chapter, we believe that local school districts should bear the basic obligations for allocating funds to increase service quality, and we reject the notion that school districts should be freed from the obligation to meet special needs unless the necessary programs are fully supported by federal and state sources. However, federal and state governments should target funding to provide incentives for school districts to meet special needs, and they should alter funding mechanisms that provide inappropriate incentives.

> Example. Currently, school districts who wish to transition students misclassified in EMH classes back into the mainstream cannot use categorical special education funds from federal and state sources to pay resource teachers to ease this transition, since once children are reclassified, they are no longer considered handicapped. A better state policy, which would help children and

save the state money in the long-term, would provide state funds for resource teachers for a limited transition period to aid misclassified students in moving back into the mainstream program.

The Benefits of Identifying Critical Preferred Practices

As explained earlier in this chapter, we regard the critical preferred practices listed above as a partial and preliminary list. Clearly, there are many preferred practices that we have not included here that could be derived from other research, and some people might quarrel with particular preferred practices that we have identified. We are anxious to engage in a continuing dialogue with others to identify those critical preferred practices most likely to enhance service quality. In this chapter, we have tried to illustrate the utility of beginning such a project, which has the potential for allowing school reformers to assemble evidence from diverse sources in light of a model that points toward practical ways to make children's school experiences substantially better. We hope that others will be stimulated to use this approach in planning for improvements in their own school districts.

Notes

1/Donald Moore, Sharon Weitzman, Lois Steinberg, and Ularsee Manar, Child Advocacy and the Schools (Chicago: Designs for Change, forthcoming).

2/Lorraine M. McDonnel and Anthony H. Pascal, "Organized Teachers and Local Schools" in Government in the Classroom: Dollars and Power in Education, ed. Mary Frase Williams (New York: Academy of Political Science, 1978); Myron Lieberman, "Eggs That I Have Laid: Teacher Bargaining Reconsidered," Phi Delta Kappan (February 1979): 416-419.

3/The Seattle Public Schools systematically collect and provide to the public much of the information that we cite in Table 7-1 as a desirable base for equitable planning. In A Descriptive Guide to Seattle Public Schools, the district publishes school by school breakdowns of racial composition; numbers of students in special programs; student achievement by grade level; and numbers, titles, and salaries of staff. In their Recommended Budget, they present detailed budgets in a program format for both the cental office and for individual schools that specify expenditures by funding source. See A Descriptive Guide to Seattle Public Schools: 1979-1980 and Seattle Public Schools Recommended Budget: 1980-1981.

4/Donald R. Moore and Arthur A. Hyde, Making Sense of Staff Development: An Analysis of Staff Development Programs and Their Costs in Three Urban School Districts (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, 1981).

5/Phi Delta Kappa, Why Do Some Urban Schools Succeed? The Phi Delta Kappa Study of Exceptional Urban Elementary Schools (Bloomington, Ind.: Author, 1980), p. 138.

6/P. David Pearson, "A Context for Instructional Research on Reading Comprehension," University of Illinois, 1981. (Typewritten.)

7/Nancy Karweit, "Time in School," Center for Organization of Schools, Johns Hopkins University, August 1979. (Typewritten.)

8/Nicholas Hobbs, The Futures of Children: Categories, Labels, and Their Consequences (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975), p. 81.

9/Ill. Const. art X, sec. 1.

10/See, for example, Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954); Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia, 348 F. Supp. 866 (D.D.C. 1972); Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 343 F. Supp. 279 (E.D.Pa. 1972); *The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, U.S. Code*, vol. 20, sec. 1401 et. seq. (1975), (Public Law 94-142); Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, *U.S. Code*, vol. 20, sec. 1681 (1972); *Civil Rights Act of 1964, U.S. Code*, vol. 42 (1964).

CHAPTER 8. THINKING ABOUT EDUCATIONAL POLICY

As we complete this report, public policy analysis concerning elementary and secondary education is in a state of flux and confusion. Both the results of this research project and the model for analyzing educational quality that has been refined through it can be of substantial help in clarifying public policy issues now being raised. Our research calls into question the adequacy of some ideas currently being advanced about whether and how public education can be improved.

To clarify how our study results are helpful in thinking about current educational policy issues, this chapter is divided into three parts. First, we review briefly some major implications of the research that are pertinent to the public policy debate. Second, we discuss selected policy issues about which our own conclusions conflict substantially with other popular perspectives. Third, we propose the first step in a reform strategy focused on the reading issue that builds on the results of our research.

Some Key Implications Drawn from This Study for Policy Analysis in Public Education

Need to Evaluate Public Policy Decisions in Light of Their Impact on Services to Children

We have documented numerous ways in which the nature of services to children differs significantly in schools receiving similar resources and dealing with similar student bodies. Differing ways in which students are classified for mainstream reading, referred for special programs, assessed for special programs, taught collaboratively by mainstream and special teachers, etc., profoundly affect students' opportunities to be classified appropriately and to have a coherent reading instruction experience. Policy analysts must constantly focus on the quality of educational services to children as the touchstone for assessing desirable directions for educational policy.

The Need to Define Standards for Service Quality

A basic and continuing public policy issue in elementary and secondary education is how to improve the capacity of the educational system to provide quality education for all children, including those children who have historically been served poorly by the schools. These groups of poorly served children include racial and ethnic minorities, low-income children, females, and handicapped children -- whom we refer to as "children at risk." We have documented numerous ways in which children's educational opportunities are limited through the specifics of day-to-day service provision. For example, we observed that frequently the more complicated a child's handicap or reading problem was, the less likely it was that anyone was taking clear responsibility for coordinating that child's reading instruction experience.

Because of the pivotal importance of educational services provided to children in determining the extent of educational quality, service quality is the most productive focus for policy analysts who are considering ways to improve the public schools.

It is useful to judge service quality in light of three complementary standards, which have been discussed in Chapters 2 and 7. As indicated in this discussion, school districts have an obligation to facilitate basic access to school and to school services. Further, schools have an obligation to provide services that have been shown through research to foster student progress toward high priority school district objectives. However, when such evidence is lacking, school districts have an obligation to undertake coherent efforts to meet special student needs that stand in the way of reading progress, even if the specifics of this effort are not grounded in clear research evidence that particular practices will lead to specific results.

Reading and Student Classification as Priority Service Quality Issues

Teaching children to read has consistently been recognized as a priority service quality issue. Our research underscores the close connection between the nature of student classification practices and the quality of reading instruction. Classification can function both as a means for providing appropriate reading instruction to children and as a means for denying them appropriate instruction, stigmatizing them, and removing them from the mainstream of school and society. We have documented both extremes of practice in this study.

Thus, the closely linked issues of providing students with the opportunity to learn to read and classifying them appropriately merit priority attention for policy analysts concerned about increasing educational quality.

The Network of Activities That Shapes Services to Children

The educational system, stretching from the classroom to school to school district to state to federal levels, is a complex interdependent social system in which actions at all levels shape the quality of services provided to children. In this research, we have identified key activities at these varied levels that shape reading instruction and student classification, and we have documented how activities (for instance, federal enforcement, school district budget planning, program coordination by the school principal) interact to determine the quality of reading instruction and student classification.

Policy analysts must develop such a multi-level understanding if reforms are to be planned and carried out that increase service quality.

Prevailing and Preferred Practices for Carrying Out Key Activities

Each key educational activity can be implemented in a variety of ways, with widely differing effects on the quality of students' school experiences (for instance, the varied ways that student referral for special program assessment is in fact handled in different schools). Building on an analysis of such variations in specific practices (as we have in Chapter 7), it is essential for policy analysts planning reforms to identify critical preferred practices for carrying out key activities -- a limited set of educational practices that, if they are consistently implemented, will make the greatest contribution to improving service quality.

Applying Six Conceptual Lenses in Analyzing the Educational System

To understand the functioning of the educational system in the effort to improve service quality, it is useful for policy analysts to employ, in turn, six differing social science perspectives: the systems management perspective, economic incentives perspective, organizational patterns perspective, conflict and bargaining perspective, subculture perspective, and teacher participation and development perspective. These perspectives can be employed as alternative conceptual lenses that collectively illuminate how the educational system functions, how the system resists change, and how change can be achieved that actually increases service quality. We have used such alternative perspectives in Chapter 4, for instance, in analyzing why school district budget development takes the form of "incremental planning."

Comments on Selected Public Policy Issues

Building on the service quality model for understanding the educational system and the study results about reading and student classification briefly illustrated above, we now comment on some public policy issues that are pivotal in assessing future directions for educational reform that will benefit children.

In presenting these thoughts, we have used as a jumping off point the policy analysis of Elmore, Wise, and other writers who express strong misgivings about what policy makers can accomplish in reforming public schools.1/ We contrast some of their assumptions and conclusions with the results of our study.

Lack of Focus in Educational Policy Analysis and Research on Services to Children

To an alarming extent, much educational policy analysis and educational research has ceased to focus on the impact of educational reforms on the nature and quality of services actually provided to children or on the impact of reforms on student growth and progress. The degree of satisfaction expressed by teachers or by local school administrators with a particular reform strategy has very often become a dominant criterion by which the adequacy of educational reforms is judged, without an attempt to determine whether the reforms are improving the quality of services to children.2/ Educational linking agents are taught that their job is to respond to problems as defined by teachers, without fully considering whether these teacher-defined problems focus on the most serious deficiencies in the services that are being provided to children.3/ Teachers, not children, are viewed as the "ultimate consumers" of innovations.4/

The assumption behind this approach is that teachers and local administrators are in the best position to define what children need. While teacher and administrator views should certainly constitute one important source of information in determining children's needs and in judging the adequacy of educational programs, our research clearly underscores the limitations of this approach. Consider, for instance the 7,000 black students in Illinois who are assigned to classes for the Educable Mentally Handicapped but who, in light of current definitions of retardation, probably do not belong in these classes. One reason that they have been misclassified in the past is that misclassification has been employed by teachers and principals as the solution to the problem of the unruly student or has been regarded as the best available placement for a child with academic problems.5/ Given the teacher viewpoint that it is acceptable for mainstream classroom teachers to confine themselves to teaching that group of students they judge "normal," misclassification in EMH is viewed by many teachers not as a problem, but as a solution to a problem. From the standpoint of the service quality model, placing the misclassified child back in the mainstream program with transitional support is the solution to this problem. But the appropriate solution from the child's perspective is in fact viewed as a problem by many mainstream classroom teachers, building principals, and EMH teachers -- and thus many of them mount strong opposition to solving the problem for the child.

Like other mortals, teachers and educational administrators define problems and problem solutions in light of their existing organizational routines, their existing frames of reference, and their self-interest. Thus, it is highly unfair to children for policy analysts to assume that educators' preferences are an adequate proxy for student needs. It is only by analyzing the impact of educational reforms on the services provided to students and (whenever possible) on student outcomes that one can make valid judgments about their appropriateness.

The Systemic Roots of Service Quality Problems

When one suggests that educator preferences may be at odds with students' needs, this suggestion often brings disbelief and strong objections. How can schools carry out practices that are harmful to children when most educators enter the teaching profession in large part for altruistic reasons, because they care about children? As our study indicates, this apparent paradox results from the fact that service quality problems do not arise because substantial numbers of educators are actively hostile toward children. Rather, these problems arise, for instance, when a teacher decides a child would be "better off" and would receive more personal attention in an EMH class even though he is not retarded; when a mainstream teacher and a special education teacher each think a child is "getting his reading" from the other; when a mainstream reading teacher follows the recommended pace for reading instruction and thus pushes to finish the year's work without helping students gain adequate skill mastery.

Such examples suggest that the roots of inadequate services to children are not grounded in the conscious attitudes toward children of individual educators, but rather in the organizational patterns, the economic incentives the political bargaining, and the unspoken and often unrecognized frames of reference that stabilize the educational system as an organization. Below we highlight a few of the misassessments of these realities that lead policy analysts astray.

Beliefs Versus Action. One of the best documented truths of social science is that what people believe and what people do are often not the same.6/ In the case of the schools, for example, we interviewed a learning disabilities teacher who expressed concern to us privately that a child she saw in her resource room was not being taught appropriately by his mainstream math teacher. However, the LD teacher was unwilling to visit this mainstream teacher's classroom to observe and assist this math teacher because "in this school, one teacher just doesn't go into another teacher's classroom." She cared a great deal about this child, but was unwilling to buck a prevailing norm of public school operation.

Plausible Reasons for Harmful Actions. If one looks at the world through the eyes of almost any person, that person sees his or her own actions as plausible and consistent with some coherent view of the world.7/ Thus, educators who make decisions that are harmful to children often have what they view as plausible reasons for their decisions, even when these decisions result in serious problems for children. For instance, the mainstream teacher who sent Hispanic children out in the hallway to color while she taught reading to the Anglo children did so partly because she felt that the Hispanic children were "getting their reading" in their part-time bilingual class.

There is a whole family of such rationalizations advanced by educators and highlighted by our research that are based on perceived constraints imposed by the educational system ("making do"). "We are making do the best we can with what we have." "He will be better off in a smaller class where he can at least get some attention."

Thus, one reason that inadequate services are established and perpetuated by educators who do not actively dislike children is that frames of reference that dominate the school subculture protect educators from recognizing the harmful impact of their actions on children's lives.

Sins of Omission. One final reason that inadequate services do not arise simply because educators dislike children is that many service quality problems result when fragmented practices provided by individual educators fail to add up to a coherent educational program for the child. Both the mainstream reading teacher and the LD resource teacher, for instance, may be doing their best to teach a child to read within the bounds of their own classroom, but they may be employing different and contradictory methods because they do not coordinate their efforts.

Thus, when one employs well-established concepts for analyzing organizational behavior (such as organizational routine or frame of reference), the reasons that service quality problems arise are thoroughly "understandable." However, when one also recognizes that other educators operating under the same financial and organizational constraints are providing much better services to children, then behavior that is understandable does not therefore become acceptable for those striving to improve service quality.

Public Policy Can Increase Service Quality

Given the existence of serious deficiencies in services to children, what can be done to remedy them through federal, state, and school district policy? Some policy analysts assert that very little can be done through top-down leadership and control. As Elmore argues:

> The traditional devices that legislators have relied upon to control policy implementation -- more specific legislation, tighter regulations and procedures, centralized authority, and close monitoring of compliance -- probably have the opposite effect they were intended to have.8/

Elmore goes on to assert that efforts to tighten control merely increase symbolic paper compliance, diverting resources from teaching children to preparing elaborate plans and filling out forms. Wise advances a similar argument against what he calls "hyperrationali-zation."9/ And Wolcott has documented the travesty that occurred in one effort to induce teachers to adopt an elaborate management-by-objectives scheme.10/

However, as we have argued in Chapter 7, the choice is not between implementing simple minded systems management approaches aiming at total control of teacher behavior and giving up on the possibilities for reform through changes in federal, state, and local policy. Rather, the potential for reform lies in identifying a limited set of critical preferred practices most crucial in increasing service quality and conducting a concerted campaign for their implementation.

With respect to the issues of reading and student classification, our own research is part of a flood of recent research that can provide the basis for defining such preferred practices.11/ Preferred practices can become the basis for specific standards for appropriate professional behavior, setting the limits for appropriate professional discretion. Thus, for example, from the standpoint of service quality, school principals should not have the option of busying themselves with routine administrative matters and leaving the nature of the instructional program to the best judgment of individual teachers. Active and laissez-faire approaches to school administration are not just two equally acceptable administrative styles that can be chosen based on personal preference; rather, an active approach to school leadership constitutes a critical preferred practice that must be expected of those who wish to occupy the principal's chair.

Taking Single Perspectives to an Extreme

Our study illustrates the ways in which the six social science perspectives described in Chapter 2 can provide complementary explanations of the way the educational system works and the way it can be reformed to increase service quality. Each of the six perspectives contains an important kernel of truth and is thus useful as a partial explanation. Many reform strategies that we view as misleading select one perspective and take it to an extreme, disregarding the limitations of that single perspective and the need to temper each perspective through insights provided by the others.

Thus, as noted above, some take a simple version of the systems management perspective to an extreme. Others assert that organizational behavior is so chaotic, fragmented, or locked into idiosyncratic work routines that no meaningful top-down control is possible. Still others, like Elmore, emphasize teacher participation and development to the virtual exclusion of other perspectives, arguing that the only hope for service improvements is to provide teachers with more professional autonomy and opportunities to share information.12/

Recognizing the limitations of emphasizing one perspective about how the educational system operates to the exclusion of others, we have developed and applied a model that draws on the strengths of each perspective (see Chapter 2). We recognize, for instance, the constraints imposed on school superintendents and principals by existing organizational patterns and by conflict and bargaining among interest groups, yet we also recognize that formal authority is respected in the educational system if those in authority use it shrewdly. We recognize, for instance, that teacher participation and creativity are absolutely essential in providing high quality services to children, yet we also recognize the need to identify those limits of appropriate teacher practice beyond which participation and creativity become rationalizations for the misclassification and miseducation of children.

Understanding How Multiple Levels of the System Affect Services to Children

One key element of an adequate conceptual approach to policy analysis is to understand how multiple levels of the educational system affect services to children. While it is sometimes acknowledged in principle that what happens in the classroom is affected by actions at numerous levels of the educational system, few researchers or policy analysts attempt to apply this insight systematically by analyzing how actions at multiple levels of the system affect services to children or what practices at higher levels of the system have to change to bring about desired improvement in services to children. Much research on educational policy issues focus on one small piece of the system --what happens in the classroom, state level resource allocation, how the special education assessment process works -- without taking the broader view that is needed.

By taking this multi-level view in analyzing reading and classification, we have identified a set of key activities described in Chapters 4 to 6, pointing out how actions at federal, state, school district, school, and classroom levels interact to determine the quality of services to children. We have pointed out, for instance, how state level funding mechanisms, when coupled with weak federal and state enforcement, sometimes create incentives for school districts to provide inadequate levels of special services; the importance of the school district budget planning process in determining how children are classified and served; the role of the school principal in shaping how children are assessed for both mainstream and special programs; and so forth.

Putting the Classroom Level in Perspective. Naturally, an adequate multi-level analysis must include an understanding of the classroom level -- the point at which services are actually provided to children and the point at which considerable discretion is inevitably exercised. However, some policy analysts have sought to emphasize the classroom level to the virtual exclusion of other levels as the point at which the quality of services is determined; as Elmore argues:

> An enduring fact of all service delivery programs...is that they depend heavily on the interaction of service-giver and client. If we isolate the factors that have the greatest effect on the quality of this interaction, we quickly discover that very few, if any, of them are subject to direct administrative control.13/

Based on our research, this statement is inaccurate. Granting the importance of the classroom in the service delivery process, we are nevertheless struck by the extent to which educational practice at the classroom level is shaped and constrained by practice at other levels of the system. For instance, given a principal who discourages teacher cooperation and fails to establish basic mechanisms for school-level service coordination, it is virtually impossible for individual teachers to carry out appropriate referral, assessment, and placement for special programs.

Thus, as we have argued in Chapter 7, the classroom level is not a key point at which basic reforms in service provision can successfully be initiated.

The Federal and State Contribution to Achieving Service Quality

Our research suggests that the past and potential contribution of the federal and state levels to achieving service quality is assessed inaccurately by many policy analysts.

Some assert, for example, that the schools were doing a better job for children at risk before state and federal intervention. However, a careful analysis of the quality of services for handicapped and minority children before the period of intensive federal and state intervention clearly indicates that this is not true.14/ As our analysis of services in Elgin and Oak Park indicate, for instance, programs that are clear responses to federal and state initiatives are often the only organized district efforts to respond to critical problems that constrain children's opportunity to learn to read. This evidence suggests that what will happen when we "get the federal and state government off the local educator's back," is that these programs will disappear, and organized efforts to meet special needs will be virtually abandoned.

Some assert that federal and state interventions create arbitrary restrictions that don't make sense at the local level, hamstring local educators in making appropriate use of resources, and create fragmentation in services to children. However, problems of fragmentation we observed were seldom primarily the result of state and federal intervention. Rather, we found that state and federal programs took their place in an already-fragmented service planning and delivery system. We observed, for example, that the federally funded Title I program and the locally funded remedial reading program in Oak Park were both operated as pullout programs, although one was entirely federally funded and the other entirely locally funded.

It is also frequently asserted that federal and state requirements constrain the "local community," keeping this community from providing the kind of education it wants to provide. But when one analyzes decision making about the allocation of resources at the local level, one doesn't find any monolithic "local community" that is being constrained by state and federal initiatives. Rather, one finds, as the conflict and bargaining perspective suggests, many local interest groups striving to influence educational decisions. For example, in our earlier research about staff development, school district administrators in one California school district complained bitterly that a state program providing funds directly to school level parent-teacher councils was a major threat to "local control," although local parent and teacher groups strongly endorsed the program.15/

Despite the frequent weakness of federal and state requirements and enforcement, federal and state initiatives constitute, on balance, a helpful intervention on behalf of children who have historically been shortchanged in the local bargaining process. Groups espousing "local autonomy," meaning in actual fact control by local school superintendents, are often speaking in their own self-interest, while presenting themselves as representing the local community and obscuring the unmet needs of groups that have fewer avenues for pursuing their needs through the local political process.

Finally, it is asserted that federal and state intervention diverts resources from service delivery that must now be used in completing paperwork and in conforming superficially with government regulation. One misleading aspect of this assertion is its failure to distinguish the effects of clear requirements and vigorous enforcement from the prevailing federal and state practice, in which enforcement is weak and largely symbolic. Superficial enforcement and related paperwork often constitutes an elaborate time-consuming game that has no effect on services.16/ However, in several instances where researchers have documented consistent enforcement, this enforcement has increased the targeting of appropriate services for children receiving inadequate services rather than undermining the appropriate provision of services.17/

Some policy analysts may agree that federal and state intervention on behalf of children is desirable, but argue that the trend of the times, as the result of the policies of the Reagan administration, make such intervention impossible. Recent efforts of the Reagan administration to include the education of the handicapped in block grant legislation provide instructive insight into this claim. A well-organized campaign by the parents of handicapped children, targeted on Republican senators and representatives, caused them to insist that special education be taken out of the block grant program and be retained as is, even though PL 94-142 is by far the most intrusive of all federal legislative programs in mandating action at the school district and school levels. As the conflict and bargaining perspective suggests, federal and state intervention can be maintained and expanded to the extent that it is based on effective political organization.

New federal and state initiatives on behalf of children can now be built on the extensive knowledge base created during the past twenty years that suggests the kinds of critical preferred practices that can productively be mandated from the federal and state levels.

The experience of the past twenty years can also provide policy analysts with a basis for thinking about how such a reform program can be made politically feasible, as new laws protecting the education of the handicapped have proven politically feasible. For instance, we believe that a focus on the reading issue has the potential for building a politically effective reform movement among parents, citizens, and concerned educators across a range of urban, suburban, and rural school districts.

Service Quality Improvement as a Zero-Sum Game

Consistent with the notion of triage that we frequently found at the local level, some policy analysts believe that improvements in service quality for one group will be achieved only at the expense of other groups. There is some limited truth in this view; as we have argued in Chapter 7, we believe that school districts should set a limited number of top priorities and should devote substantial resources to helping all children reach these priorities. To the extent that this will entail eliminating some lower priority services, the proposed reform effort will require some trade-offs.

However, both our own research and the research of others underscore the extent to which service quality improvement is not a zero-sum game; recent research underlines the ways in which the implementation of critical preferred practices very frequently benefits all students.

For example, the most careful longitudinal study of the relationship between school resources, services to children, and student outcomes is the study completed in London schools by Rutter et al.18/ Some argue that increased achievement for one group can only be accomplished at the expense of another, and that those schools that want to be instructionally effective must exclude large numbers of unmotivated students so that the majority can learn. However, Rutter found that those schools that were instructionally effective were rather consistently effective with low, medium, and high achieving student groups and that those schools that failed one group failed the rest of them.19/ He found that those schools most effective in increasing academic achievement were also those that had the best record in holding the highest percentage students in school and had the best attendance record.20/ He found that, by and large, the same characteristics of services to children were associated with effectiveness in stimulating achievement and in holding students in school.21/

In a similar vein, our own research suggests, for instance, that implementing critical preferred practices for appropriate student classification and placement at the school level will benefit students at all levels of achievement. The school staff that uses cursory methods for mainstream reading placement, for instance, is likely to misplace the high achiever as well as the low achiever, since their inappropriate assessment and placement practices tend to be used consistently with all students.

The Parent and Citizen Role

With a few exceptions, most policy analysts ignore the role that organized parent and citizen groups can play in pressing for reforms that will improve service quality. In their view, the major actors in the reform process are administrators who attempt to manage the educational system and teachers who provide the direct services, with parents and citizens as bystanders or erratic interveners in the process.22/ However, a careful examination of the reform process in the past decade shows that parent and citizen groups have been at the center of a great many reform efforts that have improved service quality. For instance, our examination of the history of six educational equity issues -- education of the handicapped, suspension and expulsion, education of non-English speakers, compensatory education, sex discrimination in education, and racial discrimination in vocational education -- indicates that parent and citizen groups in each case played an important or dominant role in raising the issue for public policy debate, pressing for initial legislation or court decisions bearing on the issue, and pressing for the implementation of these reforms at the federal, state, and local level.23/ Further, our analysis of the impact on service quality of 52 projects in which such parent and citizen groups pressed for reforms intended to benefit children at risk indicates that in 22 of them significant or highly signficant improvements in services resulted for large numbers of children.24/

In Oak Park, for instance, it has in many instances been active parent groups who have raised issues of resource allocation, lack of appropriate services, lack of program implementation, etc., that bear on the issues of service quality analyzed in this research.

Thus, as we argued in Chapter 7, efforts to improve service quality should recognize the role that informed parent and citizen advocacy groups can play in initiating the change process and in pressing for the implementation of promised changes.

A Strategy for Reform Focused on Reading: First Steps

Reviewing our own research and our critique of policies proposed by others, we suggest that it is time to pursue a new effort for substantially increasing service quality in public education. Specifically, we plan to initiate a reform effort aimed at increasing service quality in reading. The effort will build on the kind of analysis we have done in this research: examining current reading-related practices in light of the three standards of service quality proposed earlier in this report, and identifying critical preferred practices at all levels of the educational system that will increase service quality. This analysis will then become the basis for mounting a public campaign to push for these reforms.

There are several advantages to a national reform effort focused on increasing children's opportunities to learn to read. First, teaching children to read is typically the most highly valued educational objective. School districts should be devoting substantial resources to the reading issue and seeking the most effective use of their resources, even in a period where money is scarce. Second, there is a growing knowledge about the kinds of educational practices that will enhance a child's opportunity to learn to read, a knowledge base to which the present study adds some pertinent information. Third, many of the educational problems that create major barriers to educational opportunity -- such as misclassification, suspension, low teacher expectations -- can be presented more effectively in public policy debates if we highlight their role in denying children the opportunity to learn to read. For example, bilingual education and special education should be seen by the public as efforts to provide children with special programs that will allow them to learn to read. Fourth, the reading issue, like the special education issue, has the potential to mobilize parents in all kinds of communities and school districts -- including affluent ones -- where there is always a percentage of children who are experiencing difficulties in learning to read or are being kept from making maximum use of their abilities to reach high levels of reading performance. Like special education, the reading issue creates the potential to build a coalition between advocates for minority children, low-income children, and moderate and middle-income children.

To move ahead in implementing this strategy, the first step we will carry out is to work with other researchers to prepare a consensus statement of critical preferred practices that are most important in increasing children's opportunities to learn to read. Existing research findings about the way in which the activities network functions to shape services to children and about critical preferred practices for carrying out these activities should be spelled out within the comprehensive framework of the service quality model. This will entail drawing together the efforts of specialists who now seldom communicate with each other, including specialists in reading, the functioning of schools and school districts, the politics of education, the economics of education, etc.

A consensus statement reached through such a dialogue can be developed in a fairly short time and can be based on existing educational research. This statement can then serve as the basis for informing and energizing those groups identified in Chapter 7 as potential catalysts for the implementation of preferred practices -- school superintendents, school principals, school board members, parent groups, and citizen groups -- to refocus their efforts to improve the schools. For example, this consensus statement will form the basis for developing specific planning and monitoring handbooks that can be used by these groups in assessing the present practices of local schools and school districts and in pressing for reforms.

We believe that these groups, energized and armed with specific, practical ideas about how to improve the schools, can seize the present crisis in public education as an opportunity to press for major improvements in services for all children, by focusing on the central issue of teaching children to read.

Notes

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3/See, for example, David P. Crandall, "Training and Supporting Linking Agents," in Linking Processes in Educational Improvement: Concepts and Applications, eds. Nicholas Nash and Jack Culbertson (Columbus, Ohio: University Council for Educational Administration, 1977).

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5/Studies of Handicapped Students, 2 vols. (Menlo Park, Ca.: SRI International, 1975 and 1978), vol. 2: Teacher Identification of Handicapped Pupils (Ages 6-11) Compared with Identification Using Other Indicators, by Patricia A. Craig, David H. Kaskowitz, and Mary A. Malgoire.

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7/Hugh Mehan and Houston Wood, The Reality of Ethnomethodology (New York: John Wiley, 1975), pp. 8-33.

8/Elmore, p. 2.

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10/Harry Wolcott, Teachers vs. Technocrats (Eugene, Ore.: Center for Educational Policy Research, 1977).

11/See, for example, research concerning instructionally effective schools cited in Chapter 2, Note 2.

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12/Elmore, pp. 24-42.

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14/Donald Moore, Sharon Weitzman, Lois Steinberg, and Ularsee Manar, *Child Advocacy and the Schools* (Chicago: Designs for Change, forthcoming).

15/Donald R. Moore and Arthur A. Hyde, "The Politics of Staff Development in Three School Districts," prepared for The Ford Foundation by Designs for Change, Chicago, June 1979.

16/See earlier reference to the discussion of this point in Edelman, Chapter 4, Note 3.

17/See, for example, Michael Kirst and Richard Jung, "The Utility of a Longitudinal Approach in Assessing Implementation: A Thirteen-Year View of Title I, ESEA," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 2 (Sept.-Oct. 1980); Frederick M. Wirt, *The Politics of Southern Equality* (Chicago: Aldine, 1970).

18/Michael Rutter et al., *Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ., 1979).

19/Ibid., pp. 66-94.

20/Ibid., pp. 66-94.

21/Ibid., pp. 106-144.

22/See, for example, Elmore.

23/See Moore et al., *Child Advocacy*. Others who have looked systematically at the role of parent and citizen advocates in the educational change process have reached similar conclusions. See Kirst and Jung; William H. Wilken and John J. Callahan, "Disparities in Special Educational Services: The Need for Better Fiscal Management," Legislators' Education Action Project, National Conference of State Legislatures, 31 August 1976.

24/Ibid.

REPORT SUMMARY

Student Classification and the Right to Read

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THREE INTERTWINED ISSUES:
STUDENT CLASSIFICATION, READING,
AND EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

In the current crisis in public education, policy analysts lack adequate conceptual tools to plan and carry out reforms that will help the schools achieve their highest priority objectives for student learning. Below we summarize the results of a research project intended to refine such a useful model for thinking about what goes on in schools, about how schools are shaped by other parts of the educational system, and about how all parts of the system can work more effectively for the benefit of children. We then outline a practical plan to seize the present crisis in public education as an opportunity to make major reforms that will benefit children, informed by the analytical model we have developed.

The research project through which this model was refined deals with three intertwined issues of major importance in formulating educational policy: (1) the way students are classified by the public schools, (2) the impact of these classification practices on the way students are taught to read, and (3) the implications of the classification-reading relationship for efforts to improve educational quality for all children, including minority, low-income, handicapped, and female children who have historically been shortchanged by the public schools. We judge it crucial to analyse the relationship between reading, classification, and educational quality for several reasons:

- Classifying students into "slots" in schools, grades, homerooms, reading levels, reading groups, special education programs, bilingual education programs, and remedial reading programs is the major way that schools attempt to match student needs with learning programs, and this classification process has potential to either benefit or harm children.

- A major rationale for almost every classification decision is that it will enhance a child's ability to learn to read — the educational objective that most educators and citizens regard as the top priority for the public schools.

- Reading-related classification practices are especially important to those minority, low-income, handicapped, and female children who have been shortchanged by the schools. However, as we found in this research, almost every child is substantially affected, for better or worse, by classification practices. Issues of educational quality for all children are closely bound up with the tie between classification and reading instruction. And, in turn, examining these central instructional issues suggests useful new ways for thinking about public policy in education.

THE RESEARCH STRATEGY

This research project analyzed the student classification systems that shaped reading instruction at the elementary school level in two medium-sized Illinois school districts with a substantial minority student population: Oak Park and Elgin. We wanted to develop a *holistic* picture of the major overt classification systems employed in each district by answering the following four questions:

- What is the *basic structure of services* created by present classification practices and *how many students* with various background characteristics are placed in different slots within this structure? For example, how many students are in self-contained special education classes and how many of them are black?
- *Why and how* have particular student classification categories been *established*? For example, what actions at the various levels of the educational system have determined that Elgin has established a state-mandated bilingual program but Oak Park has not and that Oak Park has established a remedial reading program but Elgin has not?
- By what processes are students *assessed and placed* within the structure? For example, how are students placed in levels and groups within the mainstream reading program? How are students with reading problems assessed for possible placement in one of the special programs that provide supplementary reading instruction (like the federally funded Title I program)?
- Once students are assigned a place within the structure, how is *instruction provided* and how is the instructional process *coordinated*? For example, what reading instruction methods are being employed by a mainstream teacher and by a learning disabilities resource teacher who work with the same student and how do these teachers coordinate their work?

To investigate these questions, we employed a *focused qualitative research strategy*. We gathered data using qualitative research methods (semi-structured interviewing, document analysis, etc.) to study a limited set of research issues. We then employed systematic methods for generating propositions to explain observations contained in our field notes, and we cross-checked conclusions with quantitative data whenever possible (enrollment figures, budget information, etc.).

THE SERVICE QUALITY MODEL

To focus our research effort, we employed a specific model for understanding educational systems that we call the *service quality model*. This model facilitates accurate analysis of the way the educational system currently functions, highlighting policies and practices that limit service quality, as well as practical steps that can be taken to improve the quality of education. The service quality model both guided the research effort and was itself refined through this research project. It has five major features useful in analyzing student classification related to reading.

Feature 1. A Focus on the Nature of Services Provided to Children

There is a growing body of research evidence indicating that those concerned about improving educational quality must focus intently on the details of the programs and services provided to children day-to-day. Recent research about instructionally effective schools, for example, has illustrated that schools provided with similar levels of resources and serving similar student bodies frequently provide starkly different services to children. We conclude that service quality should be the primary criterion by which educational quality is judged.

Feature 2. Judging Service Quality in Light of Three Complementary Standards

Service quality can be judged most usefully according to three complementary standards. These three standards focus on (1) basic access to school services, (2) the opportunity to receive services shown through research to foster student progress, and (3) the opportunity to receive extra or different services responsive to special needs and abilities.

With respect to student classification and reading, the first standard suggests that identifiable groups of students (minorities, females, students attending a particular school) should have *equal opportunities for access* to services that provide reading instruction and that student classification practices should facilitate this access. The second standard suggests that school districts have an obligation to provide services shown *through research* to foster student progress in reading and to employ classification practices that allow the widest range of students to receive these effective services. The third standard suggests that even in the absence of clear research evidence that a particular program will foster student reading progress, districts have an obligation to *try in a systematic fashion* to meet special needs that limit reading progress and to classify students in ways that will maximize the potential benefits and minimize the potential harm of singling out some children for extra or different services.

Feature 3. Understanding the Network of Key Activities That Shapes Services to Children

Services to children are shaped by a complex educational and political system that stretches from the classroom to the federal level. To understand how inappropriate services and programs are created and maintained and to identify ways that better services can in fact be provided, it is useful to pinpoint *key activities* at the classroom, school, school district, state, and federal levels most important in shaping services to children. For example, we have analyzed such activities as enforcing legal requirements concerning the process of classification (at the federal and state levels), establishing educational needs and related expenditures (at the school district level), and referring students for special program assessment (at the school and classroom levels), all of which have important effects on the way students are classified. By focusing on what various actors in the educational system *do day-to-day*, we are better able to develop concrete feasible plans for reform.

Feature 4. Critical Preferred Practices for Carrying Out Educational Activities

As we use the term, *practices* are the specific ways in which the key activities described above are carried out -- for instance the specific ways in which the state department of education enforces state law, or the school district leadership develops an annual budget, or teachers identify and refer students for special program assessment.

Central in using the service quality model to plan workable reform strategies is the identification of *critical preferred practices*. These are a limited set of educational practices that, if implemented, can make a major contribution to improving service quality. For example, a critical preferred practice for assessing students for special programs (now implemented in only a small minority of schools) is that the initial teacher referral should go to a multidisciplinary school-level committee that first helps the teacher deal with the child's problem in the mainstream classroom before initiating additional assessment.

Feature 5. Alternative Perspectives for Understanding the Educational Process

The final feature of the service quality model is the use of alternative social science perspectives for understanding the nature of services to children, the network of activities that shapes these services, and the practices entailed in carrying out these activities. The use of such alternative perspectives was initially employed by Graham Allison, who argued that social science perspectives from various academic disciplines can be applied successively as *alternative conceptual lenses*, each one illuminating different facets of organizational behavior. The six perspectives we have employed are:

- The systems management perspective, which emphasizes the role of leadership, systematic planning, and formal rewards and punishments in shaping the educational system's activities.
- The organizational patterns perspective, which views the educational system as comprised of hundreds of semi-autonomous work units and underscores the ways in which fragmentation, discretion, and informal work routines frequently undercut reform efforts.
- The conflict and bargaining perspective, which views the educational systems as composed of individuals and groups vying to maintain and increase their power and control of resources.
- The subculture perspective, which emphasizes that people in various parts of the educational system develop substantially different ways of looking at the world — different frames of reference -- that decisively shape the way they behave.
- The economic incentives perspective, which underscores the key role that money plays in shaping decision making about educational programs.
- The teacher participation and development perspective, which emphasizes the importance of providing adequate staff development for teachers and of giving teachers a decision-making role when they are asked to carry out new programs.

Overall, the service quality model focuses attention on the crucial transactions between educators and children through which children are provided with educational services intended to help them learn *and* on the specific actions by professionals dispersed throughout the educational system that shape the quality of these services to children. This analytic approach helps one analyze critical educational problems in a way that suggests realistic approaches to school reform, as we have illustrated in the analysis of student classification summarized below.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDENT CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

Applying the service quality model in the present research, we first identified the major classifications into which students were placed in Elgin and Oak Park and the numbers of students in each one. In Table 1, we list these categories in which students were placed that helped determine how they would be taught to read. Table 1 shows, for example, that Oak Park served 78% of its students solely through the mainstream reading program, while Elgin served 86% of its students this way. It shows that 9% of Oak Park students participated in a locally funded pullout remedial reading program that did not exist in Elgin.

Additional analysis of these data presented in the full report illustrates its usefulness for effective educational planning. For instance, Elgin had substantially fewer children in resource placements than Oak Park (i.e., placements that provided mainstream reading instruction plus supplementary help), but more children in self-contained special placements. Further, in Elgin, there were substantial racial disproportions in such special programs as self-contained classes for the Educable Mentally Handicapped, where the rate of assignment for black students was more than eight times greater than the rate of assignment for white students (see Table 3).

Comprehensive data about the numbers of students in various classifications are seldom assembled by school district planners or by others concerned about improving the schools. Such data provide an extremely useful starting point for identifying service quality problems and for making plans to correct them.

THREE CLUSTERS OF CLASSIFICATION RELATED ACTIVITIES

Identifying a school district's major classification systems and the number of children in each one provides a kind of snapshot of the structure of the educational program for children. But what are the dynamics of this system as it operates day-to-day? Applying the service quality model has helped us identify three clusters of key activities that shape student classification and its impact on reading and thus must be fully understood in planning reforms that will benefit children:

Activity Cluster A.	Establishing the structure for providing services to students, including related student classification systems.

Table 1. Number and Percentage of Students Receiving Various Configurations of Reading Services in Grades K-6

SERVICES	OAK PARK*	ELGIN*
Total receiving reading instruction within the mainstream program only	2,987 (78.0%)	12,270 (86.2%)
Mainstream reading plus special education resource that is reading-related	204 (5.3%)	360 (2.5%)**
Mainstream reading plus bilingual	none	320 (2.2%)
Mainstream reading plus ESL	50 (1.3%)	50 (.3%)***
Mainstream reading plus Title I	150 (3.9%)	621 (4.4%)**
Mainstream reading plus remedial reading	343 (9.0%)	none
Special education self-contained	96 (2.5%)	679 (4.8%)
Total receiving some form of reading-related special service	843 (22.0%)	1,967 (13.8%)

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*Percentages are of K-6 student total. Data are from 1979-80 school year.

**Includes 63 students who receive both Title I and Learning Disabilities resource services.

***Estimate based on interviews. No exact number obtained.

Activity Cluster B. Assessing and placing students.

Activity Cluster C. Coordinating and providing instruction.

In Table 2, we list the key activities in each cluster, distinguishing those that are carried out (1) at federal and state levels, (2) by school districts, and (3) within schools and classrooms.

Below, we describe a few key findings about each of these three clusters, with particular emphasis on the prevailing practices that create inadequate services for children.

ACTIVITY CLUSTER A. ESTABLISHING THE STRUCTURE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES

Distinctive contributions are made at each level of the educational system in establishing the structure of the school program that confronts children on the first day of school.

Federal and State Levels: Moderate Constraints on Local Actions

Federal and state governments generate numerous laws, regulations, grant programs, and court decisons that shape local classification systems and related instructional programs. Some key influences of federal and state activity on local services are the following:

- Despite slippage between federal intent and local implementation, federal and state requirements often generate the only organized local efforts to meet the needs of particular groups of children with special learning needs (e.g., the only organized response by the Elgin school district to its substantial enrollment of Spanish-speaking children).
- However, local compliance with federal and state mandates is shaped by "trade-off" decisions made at the school district level. School district administrators, deciding whether to set up mandated services and what level of services to provide, weigh their own personal values, the amount of additional federal and state funding available to implement a program, the amount of additional local funding they will have to put up, the vigor of state and federal enforcement (generally weak), and any local pressures they are experiencing to implement the program.
- Taken together, key activities at the state and federal levels create a moderate set of constraints

Table 2. Key Activities That Shape Student Classification and Reading Instruction

	ACTIVITY CLUSTER A Establishing the structure for providing services to students, including related classification systems	ACTIVITY CLUSTER B Assessing and placing students	ACTIVITY CLUSTER C Coordinating and providing instruction
FEDERAL AND STATE LEVELS	A-1. Establishing relevant laws, regulations, and grant programs. A-2. Rendering judicial decisions. A-3. Allocating federal and state funds. A-4. Enforcing federal and state requirements.	B-1. Establishing federal and state requirements concerning the process of classification. B-2. Enforcing federal and state requirements concerning the process of classification.	C-1. Establishing federal and state requirements concerning the instructional process and the coordination of instruction. C-2. Enforcing federal and state requirements concerning the instructional process and the coordination of instruction.
SCHOOL DISTRICT LEVEL	A-5. Estimating school district revenues. A-6. Establishing school district needs and related expenditures. A-7. Appointing district-level and school-level administrators. A-8. Planning the mainstream reading program, including staff roles and coordination responsibilities. A-9. Planning special instructional programs, including staff roles and coordination responsibilities.	B-3. Establishing and implementing policies for assigning students to schools, grades, and homerooms. B-4. Establishing and implementing policies for assessing and placing students within the mainstream reading program. B-5. Establishing and implementing policies for referring, assessing, and placing students in special instructional programs.	C-3. Coordinating between central office staff who are responsible for mainstream reading and for special instructional programs. C-4. Coordinating instruction in the mainstream reading program, including related staff development. C-5. Coordinating instruction in individual special programs, including related staff development.
SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM LEVELS	A-10. Planning the mainstream reading program, including staff roles and coordination responsibilities. A-11. Planning special instructional programs, including staff roles and coordination responsibilities.	B-6. Assigning students to grades and classrooms. B-7. Assessing and placing students in the mainstream reading program. B-8. Referring students for special program assessment. B-9. Assessing and placing students in special instructional programs.	C-6. Coordinating among school staff who carry out mainstream reading and special instructional programs. C-7. Coordinating instruction in the mainstream reading program, including related staff development. C-8. Coordinating instruction in individual special programs, including related staff development. C-9. Providing instruction in the mainstream reading program. C-10. Providing instruction in individual special programs.

on local action. Prompted by these requirements, local decision makers initiate some level of programming for children that they would not otherwise have provided, but adjust the nature and level of this programming through trade-off decisions.

School District Level: Fragmented and Incremental Planning

School district planning determines which major student classifications will exist and how many slots will be available in each classification at each school. The budget development process is central to this school district planning and has the following features that limit service quality:

- Programs and services currently being offered (and related classification systems) are viewed as "the base." Planners view it as highly desirable to maintain the base, generally making only minor adjustments to it.

- Planners do not collect detailed information about student needs or the effectiveness of specific programs. Rather it is assumed that present levels of staffing are good proxies for student needs.

- While the majority of funds available to the districts come with no federal or state strings attached, planners view themselves as having almost no flexibility in budget planning, since it is assumed that funds currently supporting particular services to children will continue to support them (e.g., if bilingual programs were supported through state and federal funds, it was assumed that expansion of the bilingual program could come only through increased state or federal funding).

- Although budget decisions for the coming year are often based on limited data and alternatives are clearly possible, financial and program data are used selectively to support administrator recommendations, rather than to lay out alternatives for the school board and the public to consider.

While overall budget planning is proceeding, individual program directors responsible for various aspects of the mainstream reading program and for individual special programs (bilingual education, special education, etc.) also are making plans. The most striking characteristic of this planning process is its fragmentation; each program director plans largely in isolation. In general, top school district administrators with formal authority to coordinate these individual planning efforts do not devote consistent attention to achieving coordinated planning, but are preoccupied with other matters.

Research on organizational patterns makes it clear that the planning processes we documented are typical of complex organizations, where tasks are characteristically fragmented among organizational units, where administrative supervision is loose, and where organizational units compete with each other for resources rather than planning coherent service programs. However, behavior which is "understandable" in light of organizational and political theory, creates and perpetuates serious inadequacies in services to children. One such critical problem is that fragmented planning results in wide variations in the type and number of special program placements available at specific schools, variations not clearly related to differences in student need. Thus, teachers at different schools, assessing children with similar learning problems, often have sharply different options for placement. Applying the standards of the service quality model, these discrepancies represent major inequities in access to services.

School and Classroom Levels: The Decisive Impact of the School Principal

School district planning largely determines which student classification categories will exist, how many slots will be available in each, and in what schools they will be available. However, we constantly found that even those schools receiving similar levels of resources provided substantially different services to children. Consistent with other research, we found that differing patterns of school-level planning resulted largely from the principal's leadership style. The school principal's role varied from active to *laissez-faire* in planning for school-level student classification and related reading instruction. Active principals sought to bring some coherence to the ways in which services were provided to students, while laissez-faire principals left these decisions to individual staff members, believing that these staff members were professionally trained to carry out these responsibilities appropriately.

The laissez-faire leadership style produced serious deficiencies in services to children (e.g., inappropriate student placements at reading levels in mainsteam reading, superficial assessment and placement in special programs). The active principals, when they employed their active leadership style to implement more appropriate practices for student classification, brought substantial benefits to children. Specific consequences of these contrasting leadership styles will be illustrated below.

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ACTIVITY CLUSTER B.
ASSESSING AND PLACING CHILDREN

Once the structure of services for children is established, the school district must place individual children in the slots created. The most crucial activities that shape this process take place at the school and classroom levels, but the school district and to a lesser extent the federal and state governments have some impact on the assessment and placement process.

Federal and State Levels: Imprecise Standards and Weak Enforcement

Detailed criteria for classifying students are usually not spelled out at the federal and state level, nor are those requirements that are on the books vigorously enforced in school districts like Elgin and Oak Park. Federal and Illinois state requirements about how children should be chosen for bilingual and Title I programs, for instance, leave specific student assessment procedures to the school districts. Federal and state requirements for special education assessment are much more detailed, but still allow substantial leeway for local districts, especially given that enforcement efforts are sporadic and weak. For instance, Table 3 shows the percentage of Anglo, black, and Hispanic students in classes for the Educable Mentally Handicapped in a cross-section of Illinois school districts. The consensus of experts in the field of mental retardation is that 1% to 2% of any group should be classified as EMH if proper assessment procedures are employed. Yet many Illinois school districts assign more than 5% of their black students to these classes. These data have been public for several years, yet no substantial effort has been made by federal or state authorities to enforce laws prohibiting discrimination in assessment in Illinois.

School District Level: Controlling How Many

District level administrators monitor the total number of students assigned to available slots in both the mainstream homeroom classes and the various special programs to control district expenditures. From an economic incentives perspective, they have a strong incentive to do so, since mistakes (such as hiring too many classroom teachers for next year) could jeopardize their jobs.

In contrast, central office staff exert inconsistent supervision concerning which students will fill available slots. The quality of student assessment standards and the resulting care with which assessment was carried out varied from program to program, primarily reflecting the specificity of external mandates for that program. For instance, bilingual education placement in Elgin was based on what one

Table 3. Percentage of Students by Race in Classes for the Educable Mentally Handicapped in Selected Illinois School Districts*

SCHOOL DISTRICT		% OF ANGLO STUDENTS IN EMH	% OF BLACK STUDENTS IN EMH	% OF HISPANIC STUDENTS IN EMH	% OF TOTAL STUDENTS IN EMH
Chicago	K-8	1.42	3.57	1.07	2.68
	9-12	1.30	4.25	1.79	3.17
Rockford	K-8	1.00	2.48	.77	1.30
	9-12	1.15	5.85	2.10	2.01
Elgin	K-8	.60	5.17	1.87	1.02
	9-12	.88	8.78	3.95	1.41
Decatur	K-8	.98	3.24	**	1.63
	9-12	1.26	6.02	**	2.23
Waukegan	K-8	.62	3.39	1.03	1.44
	9-12	1.07	6.93	2.12	2.57
Aurora West	K-8	.90	5.28	1.89	1.60
	9-12	2.41	12.39	8.57	3.99
Rock Island	K-8	.90	2.52	.56	1.31
	9-12	1.45	8.84	1.20	2.99
Cahokia	K-8	1.18	1.34	**	1.22
	9-12	1.90	3.04	**	2.15

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*Source: 1978-79 data submitted to the federal Office for Civil Rights.

**Hispanic students accounted for less than 1% of the total enrollment of these school districts.

instructor described as "a ten-minute quick and dirty test," while special education placements usually required extensive testing. The districts lacked general criteria for the assessment process to protect the quality of placement decisions.

Further, once specific assessment procedures were adopted as part of district policy, they quickly became (as the organizational patterns perspective suggests) part of the institutional woodwork; there was no systematic effort to review established cutoff scores, testing instruments, etc., even when these procedures were creating obvious problems (such as substantial racial disproportions) in classifying students.

School Level: Wide Variations in Assessment and Placement Practice

The school level was the center of the action in assessment and placement for both the mainstream program and for various special programs.

In the mainstream program, we observed two patterns in the way school staff made the crucial decisions about what reading level and reading group were appropriate for each child. In a few schools, teachers were drawing on a variety of reading test information, personal observations, and recommendations from the previous year's teachers in making the placement decision. A principal, reading specialist, or teaching team was reviewing the placement decision; and regrouping of students in light of their progress was common. In most schools, placement was based almost entirely on the recommendation of the previous year's teacher, no one reviewed the teacher's placement decision, and there was little regrouping. When this second pattern for placing students was followed, we found evidence that many children were misplaced in the mainstream reading program.

With respect to special program assessment and placement, we also observed wide variations in school-level practice, with great implications for the accuracy of student classification. In a few schools, referrals for special program placement went first to a school-level team that worked with referring teachers to help them deal with student problems within the mainstream classroom before students were assessed further. In most schools, however, prevailing practices for student referral heightened the dangers of misclassification:

- Teachers received little assistance in determining when referral was appropriate.
- Teachers' referrals were affected substantially by teachers' estimates of whether there were any slots currently available in particular special programs.

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- Teachers justified referrals they admitted might be inappropriate through their belief that the child would be "better off" in a placement that happened to be currently available.

- In most schools, making numerous referrals did not place any stigma on the referring teacher. (Research about teachers' attitudes indicates that while teachers enter the profession because they like children and want to help them, only 7% of teachers express a preference for teaching children with special problems. Many believe they must "teach to the middle.")

Referral is typically followed by some form of assessment and a decision about placement. We identified several aspects of the assessment and placement process that undermine service quality:

- In practice, multiple perspectives were seldom applied in assessing student problems. The content of initial teacher referrals caused a student to be routed to a specialist with a particular professional orientation, and once this specialist took over the assessment process, others formally involved deferred to that person's professional expertise.

- Once referred, children were assessed to determine whether or not they should be removed from the mainstream program partially or completely. Almost no placement options included providing help to a child inside the mainstream classroom or help for the mainstream teacher in dealing with the child.

- Assessment and placement (like referral) were decisively influenced by the number of slots available in particular programs at particular schools. In some schools, for instance, a child with reading problems could receive supplementary help in remedial reading, Title I, or learning disability resource rooms. In others, the only option, given available services and barriers created by test score requirements, was placement in a self-contained class for the mentally retarded.

- To cope with students' special needs, some special program staff worked with students unofficially who did not fit their program guidelines when other special program teachers or mainstream teachers could not or would not deal with these children (a practice called "bootlegging"). However, such committed teachers attempted to cope with student problems by exerting extra personal effort, rather than by raising questions about the adequacy of available programs or about the competence of other staff members who were not working appropriately with a child.

A pervasive frame of reference we encountered among staff members who assessed and placed children has been called "pragmatism" or "making do." This belief is based on the view that educators are doing the best they can to meet children's needs, given the financial, organizational, and political constraints within which they must "realistically" function. These constraints are consciously or unconsciously accepted, and it becomes the educator's job to "make do" within these constraints, rather than to question and to change them.

ACTIVITY CLUSTER C. COORDINATING AND PROVIDING INSTRUCTION

Once students have been assigned a place within the educational program, they are provided with instructional services and this instructional process is coordinated on a day-to-day basis.

We were able to collect only limited data about the instructional process itself, so our conclusions about this cluster of activities deal primarily with instructional coordination. Because the impact of state and federal activities on instruction and the coordination of instruction is generally small, we highlight school district, school, and classroom level practices most critical in shaping instruction and coordination.

When we speak of coordination, we do not mean merely administrative busywork, but rather the development and implementation of specific coherent plans for providing services to students on a day-to-day basis. When defined in this way, coordination of services and student classifications are inseparable processes if we want to provide quality education for students. By classifying and placing students in various special programs, school districts create major coordination issues that must be addressed if classified students are to experience coherence in their instructional experiences. But it is unrealistic to think that this instructional coordination will "happen naturally" at school district and school levels, given strong tendencies toward fragmentation. As the systems management perspective suggests, only those individuals with formal administrative authority at the point where the appropriate lines on the organizational chart come together have the potential to achieve consistent service coordination. At the district level, this means the superintendent of schools and other administrators who have line authority over all instructional programs. At the school level, this means the principal.

District-Level Coordination Problems

As noted earlier, top school district leaders devote only intermittent attention to important aspects of establishing the structure of services. They spend even less time insuring that services for children are provided appropriately on a day-to-day basis. Yet coordination issues constantly arise that can only be resolved if top leaders are continually involved. For instance:

- Resolving dual responsibility issues. A special program teacher has dual lines of responsibility: on the one hand, to a school principal and, on the other, to a central office coordinator for their program. Reconciling these conflicting responsiblities for the benefit of children requires continued action by those administrators who have formal authority over both the teacher's supervisors.

- Coordinating student transitions. Insufficient attention is often paid to the specific problems created by a student's transition from one classification to another (e.g., from bilingual program to mainstream classroom).

- Coordinating staff development and assistance. Coordination of staff development and supervisory assistance on essential issues that cut across mainstream and special programs (e.g., about how mainstream and special program teachers will collaborate in the student assessment process) frequently doesn't occur.

School-Level Coordination Problems

The principal is key in dealing with coordination issues at the school level. When principals do not involve themselves in the specifics of service planning and implementation, there is, for instance, usually no one designated to insure that a unified plan for reading instruction is carried out for children who see more than one teacher for reading. When a child is participating in the mainsteam reading program and is also involved in a pullout reading experience, there is characteristically no communication or planning between the teachers involved. As a result, a student might have to face two different reading instruction systems that involve different instructional strategies, vocabulary, etc. Or the mainsteam teacher may send the child to a supplementary reading program during the time set for reading instruction in the mainstream classroom. Or the mainstream teacher may fail to teach a child reading in the mainstream classroom even though she is physically present, feeling that the child is "getting her reading" elsewhere.

THE CUMULATIVE IMPACT OF THE PREVAILING EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES ON SERVICES TO CHILDREN

By analyzing the way that key activities for classifying students and for providing reading instruction are typically carried out, one begins to unravel the maze of actions at the various levels of the educational system that undermines service quality. We found, for instance, that school district budget and staff allocations for individual schools are not decisions based primarily on an analysis of student need. Nevertheless, once these allocations are made, teachers frequently limit referrals and placement recommendations so they will not exceed available slots. We found, for instance, that school principals do not characteristically oversee student placement levels within the mainstream reading program, but that inaccurate mainsteam placement often results in referrals for special programs that could have been avoided.

It is striking that serious deficiencies in the services provided to children seldom arise because of individual educator hostility toward children, but rather from the day-to-day organizational dynamics of the educational system. A teacher decides that a child would be "better off" because he would receive more personal attention in an EMH class, even though he is not retarded; a mainstream teacher and special education teacher each think a child "is getting his reading" from the other.

Thus, deficiencies in service quality have systemic roots at multiple levels of the educational system and can only be addressed by unraveling these complex dynamics to plan systematic approaches to reform.

CRITICAL PREFERRED PRACTICES TO INCREASE SERVICE QUALITY

While our research illustrates the difficulties of achieving reforms that actually benefit children, it also underscores the fact that beneficial reforms are possible and suggests how to plan for and implement them. The most graphic evidence for this hopeful conclusion is that we visited schools in Oak Park and

Elgin that had eliminated many of the practices that undermine service quality, although they were operating under the same constraints as neighboring schools where these problems persisted. We found, for instance, school principals who established effective collaboration among teachers in student assessment and who effectively coordinated instruction, disproving the notion that fragmented school services are inevitable.

Building on a knowledge of the network of activities that shape services to children, it is possible to identify a set of critical preferred practices that will greatly increase service quality if they are implemented at various levels of the educational system. Critical preferred practices are a limited set of educational practices that, if implemented, will make the greatest contribution to improving service quality in pursuing high-priority educational objectives.

Critical preferred practices do not define a detailed recipe to be followed mindlessly, but rather define limits within which a range of options are possible. Creativity and choice are essential in providing quality services, but they must not become an excuse for practices harmful to children.

Critical preferred practices must be realistic in light of the financial and organizational realities of school districts. Thus, one desirable way to identify them is to analyze effective practices that are already being implemented, even if only in two schools out of twenty.

Despite our efforts to identify critical preferred practices that are realistic, the changes they imply will inevitably threaten to some extent the control over resources and working conditions and the customary ways of operating that various groups have built up over the years. Given these political realities, we conclude that five groups of actors are in the best position to provide the catalyst for implementing critical preferred practices: (1) superintendents of schools and other administrators with major line authority, (2) school principals, (3) school boards, (4) parent groups, and (5) citizen groups. The first three groups can initiate reforms because of their formal positions of authority within the educational system, authority which can be brought to bear effectively and persistently. The last two groups -- parent and citizen groups -- are in a strategic position to press for change in proportion to their ability to exert focused persistent pressure from outside the system. Thus, it is to these five groups primarily that we address our suggestions.

In the full research report, we have discussed critical preferred practices identified through this

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research project that will facilitate appropriate classification and reading instruction. Below, we list and briefly describe just a few of these to illustrate our conclusions:

Preferred Practice: Top district leadership should establish expenditure priorities that reflect a major commitment to helping all students learn to read. The district should recognize, for instance, an obligation to allocate unrestricted local and state funds to meet students' special needs related to handicap, linguistic difference, and poverty that keep children from learning to read. District planners should not assume that special needs that keep some children from reaching high priority district objectives like learning to read must be met solely with federal and state categorical funds.

Preferred Practice: Top leadership should provide consistent supervision to insure that student classification and reading instruction services reflect a coherent plan for meeting student needs. They should insure, for instance, that the configuration of services available at each local school reflects a coherent plan for meeting student needs, rather than the accumulation of fragmented bargaining and decision making by various central office and school-level administrators.

Preferred Practice: Multiple sources of data about student mastery and multiple staff perspectives should form the basis for student placement within the mainstream reading curriculum. This crucial placement decision, which substantially affects a child's opportunity to learn to read in the mainstream program and, if done incorrectly, can lead to unnecessary special program placement, should be carried out in all schools with a degree of care now achieved in only a few.

Preferred Practice: Referrals for special program assessment should be screened by a multidisciplinary team that should first help the referring teacher modify mainstream classroom practices. Such screening and teacher assistance, which we observed in a few schools, but which violates prevailing patterns of program fragmentation and professional deference, could greatly reduce inappropriate special program placement, reserving special program slots for children most in need of special help.

Preferred Practice: Mainstream and special program teachers who teach reading to the same child must coordinate their work to insure that their reading instruction efforts are complementary. Under prevailing practice, the greater the difficulty a child has in learning to read, the less likely it is that anyone is taking a clear responsibility to coordinate that child's reading experience.

Preferred Practice: Federal and state governments should vigorously enforce requirements for non-discriminatory assessment for special program placement. Both federal and state governments have numerous legal obligations to insure non-discriminatory student assessment. The evidence that discrimination in assessment exists (for instance in EMH assessment) is clearcut, and, frequently, so are the remedies for such problems. Non-discriminatory assessment is thus one important and feasible focus for vigorous federal and state intervention that will benefit children.

We regard the critical preferred practices listed here and in the full report as illustrations, a partial and preliminary list. We are anxious to engage in a continuing dialogue with others to identify those critical preferred practices most likely to increase service quality. Through this research, we have tried to illustrate the usefulness of such an analysis in laying the groundwork for school reform efforts that will benefit children.

THINKING ABOUT EDUCATIONAL POLICY

As we complete this report, public policy analysis concerning elementary and secondary education is in a state of confusion. Both the results of this research project and the model for analyzing educational quality that has been refined through it can be of substantial help in clarifying public policy issues now being raised. Although the project looked only at two school districts in Illinois, the conclusions are consistent with much other recent school-based research and with well-established analytical perspectives about how organizations work. Our research calls into question the adequacy of some ideas currently being advanced about whether and how public education can be reformed to achieve educational quality. Below, we comment briefly on several of these policy analysis issues in light of our research results.

Educational Policy Analysis Must Focus on the Quality of Services to Children

To an alarming extent, much educational policy analysis and educational research has ceased to focus on how (or whether) educational reforms improve the quality of services to children or how they affect student growth and progress. The degree of satisfaction expressed by teachers or by local school administrators with a particular reform strategy has very often become the main criterion by which reforms are judged. The present research highlights many ways in which educators' preferences, as reflected in prevailing educational practice, create serious deficiencies in services for children. Service quality, as we have defined it, and not educator satisfaction is the most appropriate touchstone for charting reforms that will actually benefit children.

Inadequate Services Have Systemic Roots

The suggestion that educators' preferences may be at odds with student needs often brings strong objections. It is mistakenly assumed that inferior services must result from the fact that educators personally dislike children -- a dislike that does not exist on a large scale. However, inadequate services are not rooted in individual psychology but in organizational and political reality. Both the bilingual and mainstream teacher may be making a concerted effort to teach a child to read, but their methods may result in the child's being exposed to two contradictory reading instruction experiences. Or a learning disabilities resource teacher may be concerned that a child is being instructed inappropriately in his mainstream reading class but may be unwilling to speak with her colleague about it because "in this school, a teacher simply does not go into another teacher's classroom."

Improving Services Is Not a Zero-Sum Game

Some policy analysts believe that improvements in service quality for one group of children can be achieved only at the expense of other groups. To a limited extent this is true; implementing some critical preferred practices will involve reallocation of resources. However, because so many of the deficiencies in service quality involve organizational patterns with similar effects on many groups of children, it is inaccurate to see service quality improvement primarily as a process of trade-offs between groups. For instance, we found that schools which were careless about placement decisions in the mainstream reading program were also careless about special program placement; instituting more accurate placement procedures in such schools could substantially benefit *all* students.

Public Policy Initiatives Can Improve Service Quality

Some policy analysts argue that, in the face of systemic resistance to change, very little can be done through public policy initiatives to improve service quality. However, the present research identifies specific practices that can be implemented by those in policy-making authority at various levels of the educational system that will substantially improve services to children. Our own research is part of a flood of recent research (see for instance the research on instructionally effective schools) that can be used to define such preferred practices.

Single Theories Should Not Be Taken to an Extreme

Many reform strategies that we regard as misleading take single social science theories or perspectives to an extreme. Some, for example, adopt a naive systems management approach, asserting that teacher behavior can be comprehensively controlled. Others argue that teacher autonomy must be further increased and that our only hope is to trust teacher judgment entirely. The service quality model suggests how multiple social science perspectives, each with a kernel of truth, can be applied to achieve a more balanced view, one that will most benefit children. We recognize the constraints imposed on school superintendents and principals by existing organizational patterns and by conflict and bargaining among interest groups, yet we also recognize that formal authority is respected in the educational system if those in authority use it shrewdly. We recognize that teacher participation and creativity are absolutely essential in improving educational services to children, yet we also recognize the need to identify those limits of appropriate teacher practice beyond which participation and creativity become rationalizations for the misclassification and miseducation of children.

Multiple Levels of the System Affect Services to Children

An adequate conceptual approach to policy analysis requires us to understand how all the levels of the educational system affect services to children. While it is sometimes acknowledged in principle that what happens in the classroom is affected by actions at numerous levels of the educational system, few researchers or policy analysts attempt to apply this insight systematically. We have illustrated the usefulness of this multi-level view in analyzing how student classification and reading instruction are shaped by specific activities at the federal, state, school district, school, and classroom levels.

One conclusion suggested by our analysis of classification is that the past and potential contribution of the federal and state levels to improving service quality is assessed inaccurately by many policy analysts.

Some assert, for example, that schools were doing a better job for children with special needs before state and federal intervention. However, a careful analysis of the quality of services for handicapped and minority children before the recent period of intensive federal and state intervention clearly indicates this is not true. For instance, we found that programs that are clear responses to state and federal initiatives are often the only organized school district efforts to respond to special learning needs. Some assert that federal interventions create arbitrary restrictions that don't make sense at the local level, hamstring local educators making appropriate use of resources, and create fragmentation in services to children. We did not find, however, that the problems of fragmentation we observed were primarily the result of state and federal intervention. Rather, we found that state and federal programs took their place in an already-fragmented service planning and delivery system at the local level.

The experience with federal and state intervention in the past twenty years can provide policy analysts with a basis for creating more focused and effective future efforts to improve service quality.

A STRATEGY FOR REFORM: FIRST STEPS

Reviewing our own research and our critique of policies proposed by others, we suggest that it is time to pursue a new effort for substantially increasing service quality in public education. Specifically, we plan to initiate a reform effort aimed at increasing service quality in reading. This effort will build on the kind of analysis we have done in this research: examining current reading-related practices in light of the three standards of service quality proposed earlier in this report, and identifying critical preferred practices at multiple levels of the educational system that will increase service quality. This analysis will then become the basis for mounting a public campaign to push for these reforms. Because reading practices affect all children, and because teaching reading is universally identified as a top priority goal in all schools, we believe that efforts to improve reading instruction can arouse strong support in a broad spectrum of communities, even in a period of declining resources.

Working with other researchers and policy analysts, we plan to put together a consensus statement of critical preferred practices for improving reading instruction, a project that can be accomplished quickly using existing research. This will entail orchestrating the efforts of specialists who now seldom communicate with each other, including experts in reading, the functioning of schools and school districts, organizational theory, the politics of education, and the economics of education.

This consensus statement can then be used to prepare several planning and monitoring handbooks that can be used to assess practices of local schools and school districts. The handbooks and associated training will be prepared primarily for the use of those groups that we regard as the most likely catalysts for reform: school superintendents, school boards, principals, parent groups, and citizen groups. We believe that these groups, energized by specific, practical ideas about how to improve the schools, can seize the present crisis in public education as an opportunity to press for major improvements for our children in the most crucial educational programs and services.